HER BLIND FOLLY

by

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BY H. M. ROSS,

Author of "That Man's Daughter."



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HER BLIND FOLLY.

CHAPTER I.

AUNT HANNAH AND HER RELATIVES.

"LUCILE, are you coming down?"

"Thank you, Peggy—but this book is so interesting—and it is the twentieth time I have been interrupted. No; I'm not going down."

"But Aunt Hannah—"

"Bother Aunt Hannah! I'd rather be a waiting-maid in an almshouse than have to dance attendance on Aunt Hannah!"

Peggy Stanton withdrew. She knew better than to prolong a conversation with Lucile Tarrant in this mood, but her face wore a troubled expression as she went on downstairs, meeting a young man coming up. He had a fishing-rod swung over his shoulder.

"Where are you going, Lady Peggy?" he asked, cheerily.

"I'm going to get Hail Columbia," she said, making a wry face.

"And in what key are you going to get the patriotic anthem?"

"Three or four flats—you know enough about music to understand the key," demurely.

"Poor Lady Peggy!"

"Thank you—I can get along. Save your pity for Lucile."

"Lucile? Again? What has she been doing now?"

"Nothing—as usual. Aunt Hannah insists upon her coming to the parlor to sing for Mrs. Dulcimer—you know her. And she won't come, that's all."

"Did Aunt Hannah send you after her?"

"She did."

"And Lucile won't go! And you'll have to catch it in her stead! It's a shame, Lady Peggy. I'll talk to Lucile myself, and see if I can't—"

"Don't, Will. She's upset enough now. Let her alone. I don't blame her a bit, and I won't mind. Aunt Hannah's tempers soon fly over." She laughed at him and passed on. He put his head in at his sister's door when he reached it.

"Say, Luce, don't you think you're imposing on Peggy's good-nature? You know what Aunt Hannah is."

No answer.

"Do as you like," he said, then, irritably. "But I thought you had more sense of squareness—"

There was a muttered exclamation; an object hurtled across the room. Owing to her woman's accuracy of aim, it struck the side wall instead of the brown head it was intended for. He dodged and laughed as he closed the door behind him. Lucile Tarrant,

in a white heat of anger, fairly tore the door open and went downstairs, entering the room, where sat three women of mature age, one a visitor—and Peggy. Aunt Hannah looked up frowning. Mrs. Dulcimer's angular face wore an expression of sweetness soured at its very birth. Peggy's fair little countenance was slightly flushed.

"Oh, you have condescended to change your mind!" said the old lady in a shrill voice. "We are grateful for the favor, Miss Lucile."

Words of retort trembled on the young girl's lips, but before she could open them another voice spoke:

"Poor Lucile has not been well these last two days. You must allow for her indisposition, Hannah."

The cold tones drew the attention of Aunt Hannah and her visitor, while Lucile, with a shrug of her shoulders, looked straight into her mother's eyes. Mrs. Tarrant never took prominent part in anything. When she sat in a room her chair was sure to be placed in the most obscure corner, and in company she seldom joined in the conversation. Probably it was this quietness of demeanor that chilled people in her presence; she gave one the impression of repressed power; never assertive, she still exercised a silent influence that was remarkable—until one was as well acquainted with her as her husband David Tarrant, or her daughter Lucile, or her son William. They knew, if they did not understand how she did it, that Mrs. Tarrant always had her own way.

"She might, at least, try to be agreeable," grumbled Aunt Hannah. "I ask her very seldom."

"What seems to be the trouble with you, Miss Tarrant?" asked Mrs. Dulcimer, sweetly, addressing the back of the girl's head, for she had seated herself at the piano, and was turning over the music.

"A great wish to mind my own business," said Lucile, quite clearly. She swung around on the stool. "You—you were speaking to me, Mrs. Dulcimer?" she asked. "Yes; this is quite a difficult song. Peggy, will you turn for me?"

Peggy's face was very red as she crossed the room. Mrs. Tarrant sat up straight, frowning. Aunt Hannah was black as a thunder-cloud. Mrs. Dulcimer still smiled in her own sweetly-sour manner. And whether it was the annoyance, or whether it was satisfaction at having launched a Parthian shaft at the most meddlesome old woman within a distance of thirty miles, Lucile Tarrant sang exquisitely. She sang song after song, too, without solicitation. After a while Mrs. Dulcimer began to grow uneasy, for she had two other calls to make, and there seemed no prospect of getting away. In the interval between the sixth and seventh song, and while Lucile was playing the introductory bars, she spoke.

"Don't you ever grow tired, Miss Tarrant?"

"Never, when I am practising. Perhaps you are of listening to me?"

"Not at all. You sing delightfully. But I'm afraid I must

put off the pleasure until a future time. I have to leave. So pleased, Miss Tarrant! And I congratulate you, Hannah, on your charming and agreeable niece. Good-by, Mrs. Tarrant—and Peggy."

Her voice changed then—for Peggy, the lovable, hadn't an enemy in the world. Miss Tarrant's eyes were bright and sparkling and her lips were smiling as she bade Mrs. Dulcimer a sweet adieu. Well she was aware of what awaited her once the door closed upon the visitor's dowdy form. But Aunt Hannah had compelled obedience and she had yielded it after a fashion, and revenged herself also, after another fashion. Not a word was spoken. Aunt Hannah leaned forward on her stick, staring from under beetling brows at the very handsome and very defiant young lady. Peggy sat upon the piano stool, a little bit afraid of the gathering storm. It was indeed gathering, and about to break, and this hush that preceded it was ominous of what its fury would be.

Into the silence Mrs. Tarrant's voice came once more, and what she said made Peggy clasp her hands nervously and made Aunt Hannah's face light up with satisfaction.

"Lucile, go to your own room, and stay there until you are willing to apologize to your aunt for conduct befitting an ill-bred school-girl. Go!"

Lucile had never gainsaid that quiet voice in all her life—nor dared she gainsay it now. The triumphant expression changed a little, but she held her head just as high as ever. Then she

turned quickly and left the room. Peggy rose to follow. Again Mrs. Tarrant spoke.

"I wish you would stay here, Peggy," she said. "Lucile must be made to understand that she has acted in a very unpleasant manner."

"I promised to look up a poem for Mr. Tarrant this afternoon," answered Peggy. "I did not intend to follow Lucile."

"I beg your pardon." Mrs. Tarrant smiled at her. She had an agreeable smile; it seemed to light up her whole countenance. Peggy Stanton withdrew then, leaving Aunt Hannah and Mrs. Tarrant alone. The latter did not speak again for some minutes, but went on with her embroidery. The old lady still kept her habitual position; leaning forward on her thick stick, her brows drawn together over a pair of sharp if faded blue eyes.

"I saw Charlie to-day," said Mrs. Tarrant, at last.

"Charlie who?"

"Stanton, of course." She glanced up from her embroidery. "He is looking extremely well."

"Humph!"

"He stopped to speak to me. He had David with him. The little fellow is two years old now."

"David? Is that what he called him?" In spite of herself a gleam of interest shot into the old lady's face.

"Yes. After Tarrant—Charlie always thought the world of Tarrant. His wife, he tells me, is not very well—a bit delicate."

Aunt Hannah said nothing.

"I think it would be well for you to send for Charlie Stanton."

"Well or ill, I don't intend to."

"You do not?"

"Did he ask you—"

"Oh, no. He never said a word. He is still wrapped up in Leila, heart and soul."

"He is—well, he can have Leila, and she can have him. I don't want to have anything to do with them."

"There you are wrong, Hannah. If Leila died he would never become reconciled to you, knowing that you disliked her. It isn't worth while holding in bad blood."

"Since when have I appointed you my adviser-in-chief?" asked Aunt Hannah, tartly.

Mrs. Tarrant shrugged her shoulders.

"Common decency does that. Three years ago you banished Charlie Stanton, your nephew and prospective heir, from your house because he chose to marry a Catholic. I suppose you know that he and the boy are both Catholics now?"

"He—and the boy!" sputtered Aunt Hannah. "And you ask me to send for him? How dare you? I knew. I knew it would be just that way. I knew—"

Mary Tarrant rose from her chair, and coming over stood close to the old lady.

"Nevertheless, he really cares for you. His change of faith hasn't made any change in his affection. Hannah, it would be better to send for him."

Aunt Hannah straightened up and looked into the woman's face.

"Do you know that you may be putting a nail in your own coffin?" she asked. "If he comes back and I give him his old position, what will the Tarrants do?"

"Exactly as they did before," said Mary Tarrant. "That carries very little weight with me. Money is always acceptable, of course, but it is yours and you are at liberty to do exactly as you please with it."

"One would imagine, to hear you, that you meant every word you say," said Aunt Hannah, sourly. "But you can't fool me, Mary Tarrant. I'll think it over. Perhaps I will send for him. I don't know. I'll ask Dave. At least, he's honest."

A faint red tinged Mary Tarrant's colorless cheek. She pressed her lips together, and went back to her embroidery-frame. Nor did she speak again.

* * * * *

Hannah Hubbold was the wealthiest woman in the town which her husband had literally founded, and the big Hubbold Mills were her exclusive property. She had had a better head for business than her husband, and picked up the reins of government at his death, doing excellently indeed until a severe fall some eight winters previous had partly crippled her—to the extent that she could not take so active a part in outside affairs, nor could she get around at all without the use of a cane.

The Tarrants had lived in Hubbold, and David Tarrant,

Hannah Hubbold's brother, was employed as general overseer of the Mills. Hannah's severity in demanding an accounting of every detail kept him up to the mark; and again he was naturally very conscientious. These two things made an efficient overseer of David Tarrant the dreamer, and only these.

Peggy and Charlie Stanton had grown up with Aunt Hannah, their mother, her sister, dying when one was five and the other nine years old. Charlie was the old lady's darling, and she had drawn up a will leaving the bulk of her property to him. But love stepped into his life—he met little Leila Allen—and as if her poverty were not sufficient crime, she was also a Roman Catholic. Aunt Hannah stormed and raved and threatened in vain. Charlie married and went away, with the old lady's bitter renunciation of him ringing in his ears—an unpleasant memory enough, but one which he knew he could not, very well, have avoided, since he felt that he owed a higher duty to himself and to the girl who loved him.

That had been three years before. Aunt Hannah went down into the town, persuaded, cajoled, and commanded her brother David to sell his own little house and come up to live with her. The two children, Lucile and William, protested vigorously. But Mary Tarrant, with an eye to the future, simply found a purchaser, and the following month saw them in the big mansion overlooking the bay, amid luxurious surroundings and with many servants instead of one to do their bidding. Lucile and William saw things differently when they realized the change this made

in their lives, and were inclined secretly to admire the mother who had insisted upon their coming. At first everything ran placidly enough. But before long Aunt Hannah's imperious temper brought much discord where all had been harmony. Little Peggy Stanton would not quarrel with the most irritable person alive. Lucile Tarrant was her direct opposite, having both temper and tongue of her own. Charlie Stanton was sturdily honest, energetic, with a calm judgment, manly in all his ways. Will Tarrant was a dreamer like his father, without the father's conscientiousness, and although there was work to do at the Mills, he found it easier, after a while, to drift off boating, shooting, or fishing, than to attend to any serious occupation. At first he took but a day or two—then his holidays became more frequent, and now, to the horror of Aunt Hannah's prudent soul, he seldom went at all, unless need for money pressed him.

Yet there were advantages.

David Tarrant was simple-hearted and upright, and enjoyed nothing better than to sit talking and playing checkers with his sister Hannah during the long evenings. And Will had a fine baritone voice and Lucile a bell-like soprano, so that they made life and movement in the house. Peggy, too, fitted into her olden place, and loved Lucile dearly. It would have pleased the rather bad-tempered old lady had Peggy given up all thought of the brother who had so displeased her, but she discovered that although Peggy never quarreled or displayed vexation, she had both mind and will of her own—and that mind and will were set

on seeing her brother when she or he desired it, and in writing to him as often as she pleased.

Had Aunt Hannah shown any animosity, Charlie's sister would probably have left of her own accord. She did not, however, and both Peggy and Charlie agreed that they owed her a certain debt, which Peggy must try to pay, and the only way in which she could pay it would be to remain, so that in case of necessity she might be at hand to do what she could for her. All this Charlie and she argued out seriously, in spite of Leila's pleadings to have Peggy take up her abode with them.

"I can't do anything for her," said Charlie, gravely. "And yet she has been everything to us. You must, Peg. Just as soon as she doesn't need you, why, your sister Leila's waiting for you with open arms. How do you know how Aunt Mary Tarrant will try to treat her after a while?"

"Lordy!" said Leila. "I think I'm rather sorry for any one who tries to treat Aunt Hannah in any way—"

"You don't understand her," said Charlie—he had seen the old lady's natural reserve and pride give way before the affection she entertained for him. "She'll be sore about me," he said to Peggy. "You know. Only try to be kind to her, that's all."

CHAPTER II.

MR. TARRANT ASSERTS HIMSELF.

THAT night after dinner David Tarrant drifted into the drawing-room in his usual slow fashion, and set out the checker-board upon the table, also as usual. Peggy had been practising vigorously all afternoon, and now sat idly touching a few of the keys, with a lost expression on her fair face. Mrs. Tarrant had laid aside her embroidery and was working at some fine lace. In fact, it was another trait characteristic of Mrs. Tarrant never to be idle.

"Where is Lucile? Isn't she coming? And where was she during dinner?" asked the father, suddenly.

There was silence. Aunt Hannah looked grim.

"She had dinner in her room," said Mrs. Tarrant, then.

"What is it—sulks or sickness? Lady Peggy, can't you coax her into coming down?"

Peggy looked at her Aunt Hannah and said nothing.

"She acted very disagreeably to-day," said Mrs. Tarrant. "It was shameful. I told her to go to her room and stay there until she apologized to her aunt."

"What did she do?" asked David, in a low voice.

"It doesn't matter," said Mrs. Tarrant. "It was insufferable coming from a girl of her age and training."

David gathered in the checkers and replaced them in their box without a word. He stood up, pushed his fingers carelessly through his hair, and said nothing. He put his hands in his trousers' pockets then, and looked around. He bore no resemblance to Hannah at all—and the only one in that room who might have passed for a relative of his would be little Peggy, with eyes as blue and child-like, and with the same clearly-defined expression of mildness. Aunt Hannah moved uneasily as he stood there, looking from her to his wife, and then to Will, lolling carelessly at the piano beside Peggy.

"I was speaking to Charlie Stanton this afternoon," said David Tarrant, suddenly.

Aunt Hannah was scarcely prepared for so sudden an attack on this subject. In fact, from David, this sentence took her unawares. Mrs. Tarrant did not raise her head.

"I saw him; spoke to him; and now, Hannah, I want to speak to you."

"Save your breath if you expect me to listen to any message from him."

"No. He sent no message. He doesn't give a snap of his fingers for you; he has no message to give you, although he asked if you were well, and if you were happy. I told him, Hannah, that *you* appeared to be happy—but that you were succeeding in utterly destroying the peace of my family. That may help to

make you happy—or else there is another reason which I can not fathom."

Now Hannah Hubbold dearly loved her brother David, and thought she understood him; but if he had thrown a bomb at her feet she could not have been more astonished. So unassuming was he, and so self-effacing, that thus to have herself arraigned rather startled his sister. She sat straight, as if galvanized. Mrs. Tarrant paused in her stitching—an almost imperceptible pause; the listless expression left Will Tarrant's face, and Peggy's eyes began to shine. No one spoke, however. The calm voice continued:

"When we came to this house three years ago I was a very happy man. My son, instead of the careless do-nothing he is to-day, at least had the manliness to earn his own living; my daughter Lucile, inheriting, perhaps, a little too much of your temper, my dear Hannah, was not badgered to supply amusement for every nonentity in the town."

His eyes were glowing now.

"My wife had no occasion to be harsh with her children. Yes; I was a very happy man. My dear Hannah, I intend to become happy once more. I bought back The Laurels from Don Thorp this morning, and in the course of a fortnight or so—as soon as it can be got into some order—we shall say good-by to you, my dear sister, in so far as living in the same house with you goes. But we shall always be glad to be of service to you at any time you need us."

And with an air of indescribable dignity David Tarrant, without looking at any one in the room, walked out of it.

Will Tarrant wore a blank expression indeed. He stared at his mother, whose face expressed neither surprise nor annoyance.

"By George!" he said, under his breath. "Here's a nice kettle of fish!"

"Did you put him up to this, Mary?" It was Aunt Hannah's harsh voice now.

Mrs. Tarrant shook her head slowly.

"I have not seen him since he returned this evening. I was busy before dinner. Perhaps—"

"It is Lucile, then, the little upstart! I shall punish her for this! I shall— Not a penny shall one of you have! I'll cut David Tarrant's name out altogether; I'll— The man is crazy, woman, the man is crazy! Leave me alone in this house, with only Peggy and the servants? I won't stand it!"

"If David says so you know we'll have to do it," said Mrs. Tarrant, quietly.

And Aunt Hannah, sputter as she might, felt that she had roused an antagonism which was all the fiercer for its rarity. She did not know what to say to express her feelings at this exhibition, and it was a subdued group, and one entertaining very disagreeable sentiments into which a young man was ushered some ten minutes later. He was a well-built, good-looking, frank-faced fellow, and he greeted them with cheery smiles.

"Hello!" he said. "Do I intrude on family privacy?"

"Always welcome," said Aunt Hannah. She liked Mrs. Dulcimer's grandson Teddy Saunders, and he, in return, was quite fond of the peppery old lady. Or perhaps it was another attraction that brought him so frequently. At any rate he looked about the room with laughing eyes.

"Where's the rest?" he asked. "The checker king is missing and—Miss Lucile."

"Mary, will you ask Lucile to come down for the evening?"

It was Aunt Hannah who spoke—without turning her face in Mary Tarrant's direction. The latter immediately rose, however, placed her lace work on the chair, and left the room.

What she said to her husband and her daughter could not be surmised, but in a few moments she returned with both of them, Lucile all smiling courtesy to the masculine visitor, who became absorbed in her immediately to the exclusion of every one else in the room. David sat down in his old place and set out the checkers as formally as before, and after a while, when he had them all arranged, he pushed the board over in his sister's direction.

"Will you move first?" he asked.

Thus was apparent harmony restored. Peggy showed only listless interest in Will Tarrant's conversation, and he was too strongly disturbed by his father's sweeping declaration before them all that night to try to engage her whole attention. After a while both lapsed into silence. Peggy was thinking of her brother as she sat there, her fair little forehead wrinkled with lines of thought—of her brother, and pale-faced Leila, and dear little

David. How much good she could do in that household where all loved her, and how little good she was here, where Aunt Hannah had everything she wanted and did not need her.

"And there I could practise my religion without hindrance," she mused, a little sigh parting her lips. Then followed the thought: "What will Aunt Hannah say when she hears I've been a Catholic three years—long before Charlie thought of it? And what will Aunt Mary Tarrant say if she sends for him? But would he come? I know one thing—he won't touch her money if he does come. *Isn't* it a comfort to have such a brother? Isn't it a comfort?"

She became aware at last that she was staring straight at Mrs. Tarrant's face, and that Mrs. Tarrant's eyes were looking into hers. The young girl did not like their expression, but it was only a moment before the lids covered them. Peggy shivered. She wondered if her Aunt Mary disliked her. And then she heard Lucile's voice and her laugh, and the worried lines left her forehead, for Lucile's laugh was infectious.

"Come over here, you little pigeon," said Lucile. "Come over here, and let that swain beside you get back the use of his tongue. What have you done to him to-night, Peggy?"

"If I had done anything he would not be sitting there—like that," said Peggy, in her demure fashion. "He is off in dreamland somewhere."

"What, with fairyland beside him?" asked Teddy Saunders, in a rollicking tone.

"And why not? He's grown up now," said Peggy. "Only children are permitted to enter fairyland."

"I think there's more truth than fiction in those words," said Lucile, carelessly. She patted Peggy's hand. "I often wonder what she hides under that curly thatch of hers; and what pretty thoughts are locked up behind her lips. I'm afraid no one understands our Lady Peggy."

Peggy laughed brightly.

"That is it, Teddy. There is nothing to understand, nothing to conceal, and because I keep my poor, vain little thoughts to my own poor, vain little self, I am accounted wise."

"Unfortunately," said Teddy Saunders, "I must agree with Lucile."

"Not unfortunately—you mean naturally," said Peggy, with a soft color in her cheeks. "If you were to disagree with Lucile I would think the end of the world was coming."

"Well! That's a nice reputation to give a fellow! But wait, Peggy, before I forget it—Charlie was around to my house this afternoon. He wants you to go to Leila in the morning. Say, Leila's pretty sick, isn't she?"

"Oh, *no;* surely not! I was there day before yesterday and she seemed quite bright and happy."

"Charlie's just full of her. I wish the old lady would be reconciled before anything happens. He'll never forgive her if Leila dies, never."

"You can't blame him," said Peggy, with spirit. "Leila's

the only one in the world for Charlie, and I don't see how he can help it. What's more, he doesn't want Aunt Hannah or her money, either—"

A servant appeared in the doorway. He had a note on a tray, and as he looked around the room, Aunt Hannah, with a finger on a checker, spied him.

"What is it, Clarke?"

"A letter for Miss Peggy, madam."

"Miss Peggy—"

But Peggy was across the room and had torn the note open, and was reading the few lines it contained. She grew very pale, pressed her lips together, and stood as if trying to control her emotion.

"What is it, Peggy?" asked Aunt Hannah, solicitously. The others rose at once and crowded about her, but she put them aside, and laid the note before her aunt.

"Little David dead. Come at once to Leila."

It was unsigned, but all knew from whom it came. Mr. Tarrant stood as if turned to stone; even Mrs. Tarrant's face lost its usual calm. The others expressed the deepest horror.

"David! David, the child! How horrible!" said Mr. Tarrant. "Why, I saw the little fellow, had him in my arms this very day! He was laughing and chatting— Pshaw! It can't be true," burst from the man's lips.

"David!" exclaimed Teddy Saunders. "Oh, the poor fellow, the poor fellow!"

Aunt Hannah's face was gray; her lips were trembling. Peggy walked toward the door, but the old lady's voice quavered after her:

"I'm going with you, Peggy," she said. But Peggy did not heed.

"Tell Polly to bring my heavy shawls, and get the carriage ready," she said then to Lucile and Will, and both hurried to obey her, very much shocked at this terrible news. Poor Mr. Tarrant seemed the most affected of all. He could hardly stir now from his seat. His face looked ashen, as he kept repeating over and over:

"The poor little chap! Oh, the poor, poor little baby! How in the world could it have happened?"

CHAPTER III.

THE RECONCILIATION.

LEILA STANTON had lain with white face on her pillow ever since she had looked upon David's lifeless little body. Five minutes before he stood laughing up into her face with his loving baby eyes. Then he had run away from her. It was presumed that he dropped the ball with which he was playing, and in trying to recover it, lost his balance and pitched through the opening between the banisters, striking the floor below head foremost. The young mother, thinking that he had merely toddled into the adjoining room to the nurse, paid no attention to the excitement which seemed to fill the lower hall a few moments later, until she heard a loud wail from their one domestic, and looked up at the nurse with rather startled eyes.

"I think that's Maggie," she said. "Is David in there with you?"

"No—I have not seen him."

"But I am *sure* he went in there," persisted the mother. "Do look again, Miss Day—or see what *is* the matter with that girl—"

Miss Day opened the door at once, and went down to where

Maggie was seated on the floor, rubbing the child's limbs and moaning over him in a distraught manner.

"Good heavens!" she said. "How has this happened?"

Maggie did not know. She had heard the crash and came out to find the baby in a little heap on the floor. The grocer's boy had run for the doctor—

"No need to rub his limbs like that," said Miss Day, in a hushed voice. "The child is dead."

Looking up then, she saw Leila's white face peering at her from the top of the landing. She started toward her.

"Don't come down, dear," she said, "don't come down."

"Bring him to me, then," said Leila Stanton. "Bring my boy to me."

There was a terrible scene. At first Miss Day tried to keep the worst of it away from her—but nothing could. Some one found Charlie Stanton, and when he entered his wife's room, she threw herself on her knees.

"Charlie," she said, in a whisper, "they will not let me see him—they will not. Make them let me see him, Charlie."

The half-crazed light in her eyes frightened him. He lifted her in his arms, and carried her into the next room, where the little fellow lay upon the couch as if asleep, not a mark upon him save a slight bruise on the temple. Leila said nothing. But she stooped over and kissed the little cold face and lips. Then, turning, she looked up into Charlie's face. He knew what those eyes so mutely implored.

"Leila, darling," he said, his soul shaken to its very depths. "Oh, Leila, no. Do not leave me yet, dear—I am not able to bear it or to spare you. Leila, Leila, ask God to leave you to me just a little while."

She sighed and shook her head and did not remonstrate when he carried her out again and laid her upon the pillows. The doctor who had been called, uselessly for the child's sake, looked grave at sight of the mother. Charlie Stanton, after sending for Peggy, sat beside his wife, holding her hands in his, calling her name tenderly, smoothing the hair back from her temples. Neither word nor touch moved her. She simply lay like one who had received a death-wound. The priest who had been her confessor for years entered the room, and Charlie gave up his place to him. There were tears in the pastor's eyes when he came out again.

"Try to resign yourself, Charlie," he said. "I'm afraid she will not last much—"

"No," said Charlie Stanton, between his teeth. "I won't let her go. I will not let her go, I tell you, Father. She is all I have left now, and I will not let her go."

The priest knew that this was the first rebellious outpouring of the sorely-tried nature, and he tried to soothe and comfort him. His words might bear fruit later on, but now in the despair of those terrible first hours the man could not contain his grief. And yet he had to contain it for the sake of that poor, white-faced, young soul praying for death in the inner room.

When Peggy came she found them so—Leila lying with her pale, impassive countenance on the pillow, her husband sitting beside her, clasping her hands, his eyes resting imploringly upon her. He gave place to Peggy at once, and the girl put both her arms about her brother's wife, whispering gentle words of comfort that the latter neither heard nor heeded.

Charlie Stanton went out of the room, leaving his wife and sister together.

Aunt Hannah was standing beside the child, whom Miss Day had dressed and laid out in his last sleep. The little body was almost covered with roses, and their odor was heavy in the air. The grim old lady looked up from the beautiful baby-face and met her nephew's eyes. He was so changed. The years had made him a little older, but the last hours had aged him more than any years could have done. His face was drawn, his eyes sunken. Aunt Hannah, leaning on her stick, forgot that she had banished him with bitter words. She only remembered that he was her darling; that, no matter how she tried to tell herself that she had forgotten him, he still had possession of her heart.

"Charlie!" she said, in tones of deepest feeling. "Charlie, my own poor boy."

She had been gentle to him always, until those last few months of opposition made her hard and cruel. The loving remembrance he had of her rose up within him at the tremor in her voice. He went to her side at once, and put his arms about her, and blessed tears come to his eyes and fell on her gray head and on her lined

forehead. She, too, was crying, clasping him and leaning against him, all the barriers of pride broken down.

"My poor boy!" she said. "My poor boy! Oh, Charlie, oh, my poor boy!"

After a while they became calmer. She sat down on the sofa, and in brief and broken words he told her how the terrible thing had happened. But he did not speak of Leila, although they could hear Peggy's low murmuring speech from the other room.

"They told me—" Aunt Hannah averted her head, "—they told me that your wife is not well."

"No," he answered, "she is not well. And this," he added, "this will kill her."

"Don't say that, Charlie. She must feel it frightfully, of course, but it will wear away. I don't want you to think me hard-hearted, though I've shown a great deal of it to you, but if I were you I would just get the little fellow buried quietly and not allow her to see him again. It will only make matters worse. Bury him to-morrow—and then take her away from these surroundings at once. It is the only thing you can do for her. Take her away."

"I will, aunt; I must—if she lives long enough," he said. "I shall tell Miss Day, and have her come with us—"

"I wouldn't," said Aunt Hannah, and had her nephew been less sorrowful he would have smiled at the quick determination of the tone he knew of old. "Take Peggy. I'll hate to spare her, but you can have her for a while if you promise to return her to me."

So little David Tarrant Stanton was buried the following day, and the next morning Peggy, Charlie, and Leila were speeding northward to the region of the pines. The mother obeyed her husband with a docility that was touching, which showed how little she realized the bereavement she had just endured. Her brain was, mercifully, steeped in forgetfulness. She did not ask for her child—only that her eyes would cling beseechingly to her husband's face, and day and night he could not leave her.

In view of this giving up of Peggy, David Tarrant could not think of broaching the subject of their departure to Aunt Hannah, and, indeed, it seemed from that night a different spirit entered the house. Lucile was more gentle in her manner, and Aunt Hannah, softened by her reconciliation to the cherished idol of her heart, was more amenable of speech. Will, a little ashamed of the negligence for which his father had so forcibly shown his contempt, went to the mills every day. David Tarrant was agreeable and genial and easy-going as of old, and altogether things were running quite smoothly when an unforeseen event occurred.

At breakfast one morning the sturdy old lady did not put in an appearance. Mrs. Tarrant went to her room to ascertain what was the matter, and found her lying, partly dressed, across her bed, gasping for breath, her face purple. She was subject to attacks of this description, and Mrs. Tarrant knew just what to do for her. With the assistance of her attendant they disrobed her and applied the usual remedies.

But the day wore on and Aunt Hannah did not grow any bet-

ter. The doctor spoke about a consultation. The next morning all in the house knew that Aunt Hannah's hours were numbered.

Mrs. Tarrant installed herself as mistress of affairs—a position easy for her to fill, indeed, and, much to the dissatisfaction of the older servants, began to rule things with a hand which was not less severe because it was so quietly efficient. The sentiments of those surrounding her had very little weight with Mrs. Tarrant.

And yet no exceptions could be taken to her in the sick room, and the doctor congratulated her on her ability as a nurse. Soft-voiced and softly shod, always self-possessed, always prepared, she, in addition, was seemingly tireless. There were powders to be administered every hour, and medicines, and Dr. Spencer knew he could rely upon her.

It was at the close of the fourth day of the old lady's illness that Mrs. Tarrant, sitting beside the bed, heard a change in the guttural breathing. She arose and bent over her. Aunt Hannah's eyes were wide open, and her lips moving. After a little speech came from them.

"How long have I been sick?"

"Four days."

"Four days? Who has attended me?"

"Dr. Spencer."

The old lady turned restlessly. Her head rolled from side to side.

"Get me paper," she said. "Get me paper."

Mrs. Tarrant rose at once, bringing paper and pen to the bedside.

"Write the date," said Aunt Hannah.

Mary Tarrant did so, and waited.

"I bequeath unreservedly to my beloved niece and nephew Charles and Margaret Stanton, the whole of my personal property, including the Hubbold Mills. To my brother David, $10,000; to his wife, Mary, $5,000; to Lucile Tarrant, $5,000; to William Tarrant, $5,000; the legacies to my servants to remain as in the will to which this is an amendment."

Word for word Mary Tarrant wrote, and then, without a change of countenance, held the old lady up in bed until she signed it, with the decision that had been part of her in life and remained with her during her last hours.

"Now send for Lawyer Degnan—in case he doesn't get here in time that's settled. Give me the paper."

She folded it and put it under her pillow. Mary Tarrant went out of the room and down into the servants' hall. She merely glanced about her and came up again. One of the servants, Peter Morrow, had been dispatched, some half hour previously, with a message to Mr. Tarrant at the mills. Mrs. Tarrant returned again to Aunt Hannah's room.

"You have sent for him?" asked Aunt Hannah.

"Yes."

"Who went?"

"Peter."

"Peter—he should be back in less than a half-hour. I don't want to die without attending to that properly. Perhaps you'd better call some of the servants and let them witness—"

"I wouldn't do that," said Mrs. Tarrant, soothingly. "You know how they'll talk. You're not dying. This weak spell will pass off."

In spite of herself a gleam of hope shot into Aunt Hannah's eyes. With the longing for life inherent in each one of us, she grasped at a straw.

"You think so?" eagerly.

"Dr. Spencer said you'd be very weak—but not to be alarmed; it was only natural. Degnan will be here soon. Wait for this matter until he comes."

She watched the curious twitching of the old lady's lips, the peculiar color of the face; she knew that Aunt Hannah was dying—and she looked at the clock, wondering how long she would last.

A few minutes later Aunt Hannah struggled up in bed.

"Polly!" she called in a loud voice.

"Yes, ma'am." Polly's face appeared at the door of the inside room.

"Has Peter come back? Go down and see if Peter—"

Polly ran down the stairs quickly. When she returned to tell her mistress that Peter had just arrived, Mrs. Tarrant was quietly closing the dead woman's eyes, and folding her hands one above the other. She looked up as Polly entered the room, and her face was very pale.

"Has Mr. Tarrant come?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am, and Peter—both are here."

"Tell Mr. Tarrant to come up—your mistress is dead," and then she added in a peculiar voice, "If he had been but a few moments earlier! What a pity—that he was not a few moments earlier!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOMAN REFUSES.

HANNAH HUBBOLD, the mistress of Hubbold Hall and the owner of the great Hubbold Mills, was laid to rest beside her husband with all due solemnity. The news of her death was flashed to the Stantons at Lakewood, but Leila was in too precarious a condition for either her husband or his sister to leave her. Since Aunt Hannah was dead they deemed their presence with the one who needed them more imperative a duty than would be the attendance at the funeral of one beyond their aid.

After her interment came the reading of her will: a document which showed the spirit of the grim old woman who had caused it to be drawn up in the first and worst of her bitter anger against her nephew, Charles Stanton. David Tarrant inherited the bulk of her fortune, including the Hubbold Mills. Margaret Stanton was left $50,000 on condition of her never becoming a Roman Catholic—in event of which, the money was to revert unqualifiedly to David Tarrant and his family. All the servants were remembered—but Charlie Stanton's name was not mentioned.

With much distress Mr. Tarrant heard this will read. Honest and open as the day, he had hoped for much from Aunt Hannah's

reconciliation with their nephew, and he sincerely regretted the unlucky chance that had stricken her so suddenly.

"It is a shame," he said. "She would have altered this will had she realized how close to death she was."

"I know that she wanted me to send Peter for Lawyer Degnan," said Mrs. Tarrant, "but she died right after making the request. You'll give Charlie a few thousands, David?"

"I'll give Charlie what belongs to him—the Hubbold Mills," said David Tarrant.

"Do you think you can play battledore and shuttlecock with a piece of property like that?" said Mrs. Tarrant in a strangely quiet voice. "I don't know what sort of a Don Quixote you are, or are trying to be—but the mills are yours and you're going to keep them."

And David Tarrant knew that he would, too, when she spoke in that fashion.

The news of her legacy and the condition on which she was to inherit it brought an indignant note from Peggy Stanton, declaring her religion, and saying that she wanted to have nothing to do with Aunt Hannah's money. Mr. Tarrant grew all the more gloomy. While Hannah was there to direct matters with her superior strength of will he had been happy in his work. But now the feeling that he was working for himself, earning money that he would never enjoy, seemed to take the heart out of his daily toil. The feeling, too, that Hannah would surely have changed her will, had she had the time, preyed upon him. Besides that

Will Tarrant relapsed once more into his careless habits, and the father realized that this time he could not lift him out of them. He wrote to Charlie himself—a touching letter, begging him to come back as soon as Leila's health permitted it, and to join him as his assistant. Charlie answering, faithfully promised that he would, and meant to keep his word. Lucile was the father's only comfort. The days of dissatisfaction following upon Aunt Hannah's death seemed to draw them together. He could talk over all that annoyed him with her. She partly comprehended his sentiments and sympathized with him.

There was a great change noticeable, too, in Mrs. Tarrant. Always cold and reserved, she seemed to draw further into herself, avoiding intercourse either with her husband or Lucile. One by one, too, she began to discharge the old servants at the Hall, filling their places with people brought from a distance. She had renovators and builders take charge, and in the course of six months, so eagerly did she spur them on, the Hall was almost entirely changed to suit the whims of the new mistress. Altering this and changing that, and always poring over plans and schemes of decoration until, after remonstrating in vain, David Tarrant took refuge as usual with Lucile.

"I don't know what's come to your mother," he said, despairingly. "She seems an entirely different woman. And look what she's doing to the Hall! Hannah would turn in her grave if she knew."

"Well, she doesn't know," said Lucile. "And as for the Hall,

it's new to mother, and I wouldn't worry so long as she lets us alone. She'll get tired after a while, father."

"But my dear, she's wearing to nothing. Have you noticed how thin she's getting?"

"As soon as she has fixed the place up to her satisfaction perhaps she'll go away for a few weeks," said Lucile.

She would not tell her father that she had noticed more than the increasing emaciation which he deplored. She had noticed that her mother was only satisfied when throwing herself heart and soul into some work that took up all her attention; that she was subject to fits of extreme depression; and that she would sit for hours staring into vacancy until called upon to decide some point in the changes she was bringing about. Lucile watched her with growing uneasiness, but she thought it better to say nothing. She wondered what Mrs. Tarrant would do when necessity for action was removed. Would she indeed go away as she had told her father—and if she would not—

Her worst fears were realized. With the departure of the last decorator from Hubbold Hall the busy, tireless woman fell into a state of positive inertia, of settled melancholy. Dr. Spencer advised change of scene at Mr. Tarrant's earnest solicitation. But Mrs. Tarrant merely declined, in her curt fashion, to go away, and after a short while kept mostly to her own apartments. Or if by chance she left them, she endeavored to avoid Lucile, seeming to have taken a great dislike to her. In the evening Mr. Tarrant would go up to her room and sit with her; and often Will

would drop in and try to talk over some topic he thought might interest her. Lucile was left to her own devices.

One night, however, Mr. Tarrant found his wife brighter than he had ever seen her—more like herself than she had been in days.

"You are feeling better?" he inquired, much pleased at the interest in her eyes.

"I am not ill," she answered. "I have not been ill at all, and do not intend to be ill. I have a letter here from Teddy Saunders. He wants to marry Lucile."

"Wants to marry Lucile? And does Lucile want to marry him?"

"I don't know—it's hardly necessary to ask her. The letter is to you as well as to me." She tossed it to him as she spoke. "Tell her I said she should marry him."

Mr. Tarrant looked at her with utmost consternation on his face.

"Tell her to marry him! Mary, I believe you've gone daft."

Mrs. Tarrant made a careless gesture.

"Either marry her to some one or send her away. She grates on my nerves. I wish she would marry Saunders. He's good enough, David, and the girl is too headstrong now. If she marries she will probably lose that stubborn temper."

Mr. Tarrant could scarcely believe his ears. She spoke too rationally to suppose madness, and he knew that she had always inveighed against her daughter's utter lack of discipline. But to think of marrying Lucile to a young man she was not disposed to

marry was so utterly foolish that had any one but Lucile's mother proposed it, her father would have enjoyed it as a rich joke.

"My dear Mary," he said, very gently, "you know Lucile. If she doesn't care for Teddy Saunders, as good a fellow as he is, she won't have him. I think a hundred per cent. more of him because he has written to us first—I'll write back and tell him to try his luck in person—and wish him good luck, too. He's a nice chap."

So Teddy Saunders was elated to receive a thoroughly business-like epistle from David Tarrant himself the following morning; and later in the day he came driving to the Hall behind a handsome, high-stepping black horse. Lucile, delighted to escape a monotony which was daily becoming more depressing, gladly consented to go with him, and Mrs. Tarrant watched them drive away together with something like satisfaction on her face.

Teddy Saunders had always liked Lucile Tarrant, and the liking of boyhood's days had grown into the affection of manhood. He had never thought of any one else, Lucile having been so long a settled idea with him. He thought that the girl so considered it as well, and it was with rather more of confidence than might be expected that he broached the subject to her.

"I haven't as much to offer you as you have now, Lucile," he said, frankly, "but I know well enough that that will not count with you. I can make you comfortable and I can make you happy—if a man's honest, earnest devotion can make a girl happy. I want you to marry me, Lucile."

She liked him then for the honest directness of his speech, for the honesty of his face and his eyes. But she shook her head and smiled, half-sadly.

"Teddy, dear, we can be earnest friends—devoted in that way if you wish. But as husband and wife we would be rank failures."

He looked at her as if he scarcely comprehended her; a slightly puzzled expression on his face.

"Why, Lucile, you mustn't make prophecies of that sort—we are certain to get along excellently well."

"I can assure you that we are, Teddy, because I do not intend to marry you."

She smiled so sweetly at him as she spoke that still he did not understand.

"And why not, Lucile?" with a laugh. "You have to give me your reasons."

"There's only one, Teddy. I don't love you."

"That depends on what you call love, Lucile. I'll be satisfied with what you can give me. I like quiet affection the best, myself. I think two people can get along very well on it."

Lucile smiled into his eyes.

"I give you credit for thinking you speak the truth, Ted. Our affection is more of the sister and brother kind. You don't love me—I wouldn't be satisfied with the love you can give me. And if, at first, you'd be satisfied with what I could give you, in the end you would be disappointed. So should I, Ted. I really like you too well to marry you."

The earnestness of her voice conveyed the impression at last that she was speaking words which she really meant; that she was not joking. His face became very grave, his mouth had a downcast curve.

"Lucile, I wonder if you know what you are talking about?"

"I wish *you* knew as well," said Lucile, very gravely. "Try to comprehend that I do."

"But you don't love any one else—there's no one—"

"And because there is no one must I necessarily marry you?" She looked at him with sparkling eyes.

"No, Lucile," he said, despondently. Adding: "You have made me very unhappy."

"You think I have—but it will wear off in a little while." She laid her hand upon his arm. "Teddy, listen to me. This may be a vagary, a day-dream on my part—but I shall never forget the feeling that came over me the day I said good-by to Leila Stanton and Charlie at the station—that morning, you remember, when they were going away." Teddy nodded. "There was such an expression on both their faces. She was so pale, so shadowy, and yet she looked at him with such trustful, confiding eyes! And every action of his breathed tenderness. He was not only *acting* gently, but thinking gently of her, and his thoughts seemed to surround her like an atmosphere. I don't mind telling you that I had known we liked each other and that in the end I thought we might marry. But not now, Teddy. There's a difference some way, dear. Even if you worshiped me, which you do not, I could

not accept that tenderness from you. I could not return it. Teddy, dear old comrade, you'll have to be satisfied with my friendship."

The rest of the drive was finished in silence. When they reached the door of the Hall and Teddy had helped her down and climbed back again himself, he leaned toward her out of the carriage.

"Needless to say how sorry I am, Lucile," he said, in a low voice, "and if ever you change your mind—"

"I shall change my mind when you are the cherished and cherishing husband of some lovable little woman," she said, with a laugh. "And perhaps I, too, will think of the fortune I refused when the husband I take gives me a good beating."

"Lucile! Don't jest about it!" he said. "I have hardly deserved a jest."

"Teddy, I never meant—"

But he had whipped up the horse and was gone, and she stood looking after him with a rueful countenance. Then she shrugged her shoulders and went inside.

That night after dinner—to which meal the mother never came down now—Lucile told her father of Teddy's proposal and also told him that she had refused him.

Mr. Tarrant did not relish the information.

"I think your mother is a little worried about your settling down in life," he said. "How old are you, Lucile—twenty-four?"

"Next birthday," she answered.

"And Teddy is a good fellow, child—just as fine a fellow—"

"I know that, dad. But what in the world is the use of my marrying him because he's a good fellow? How ridiculous! You might as well tell me to marry Will. I have the same sentiments, almost, for Teddy. What sort of affection is that to start married happiness on?"

"A very fine sort indeed," declared Mr. Tarrant. "The best sort."

Lucile pressed her lips together. Then she put her hand on her father's arm and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Do you really believe that, father? Speak the truth now. Isn't there such a thing as love in the world?"

"Yes, Lucile. But so few people find it, and so many mistake blind folly for the divine passion that it is never safe to wait."

She laughed up at him.

"Oh, you wise, wise father! Tell me now, dear—did *you* ever know what love is?"

He hesitated; looked down at her; his lips parted.

"Yes, Lucile."

"It was mother?"

"No, dear. It was years before I met—mother. I won't go over it. It was all—we parted because of an unfortunate mistake. And yet—"

"And yet?"

"You are named for her, dear."

"I am named for her!" a soft little sigh parting her lips; "for the unknown Lucile. Does mother know?"

He looked embarrassed.

"I never told her. But your mother was always a superior woman. She wouldn't mind a trifle like that. Besides, it is forgotten long since." He drew himself erect. "So why talk of it?"

"We won't, father, unless you again insist that I should marry Teddy Saunders."

"Your mother and I, my dear, were very, very happy."

"It is different to the happiness I want, father. You wouldn't think it fair or right that I should marry against my own heart."

"Your mother—"

"I know. There's something the matter with mother, dad. I think she has taken some sort of a dislike to me, though it seeme horrible to say it, doesn't it? I tell you, father, let me go to Peggy at Lakewood. She hasn't written to me in two weeks. Perhaps I can talk her and Charlie into some sort of settlement that would please you, dear."

"If you only could," he said, gloomily. "It would ease my conscience, Lucile, although I won't know how to get along without you."

"Leave it to me, then," said Lucile. "And if I can't persuade them—well, I'll come back and you can marry me to Teddy Saunders if he'll have me."

Her father laughed at her bright face and kissed her then, and turned to go to Mrs. Tarrant's rooms with a lighter heart.

CHAPTER V.

"BLIND FOLLY."

LUCILE, a welcome addition to the Stanton party, had been with her cousins three weeks. Leila was at last beginning to improve in health, and Charlie, her devoted companion, had little time to spare for Peggy, who found the days weigh heavier and heavier upon her hands as Leila grew better. So that Lucile, when she came, was a veritable Godsend to the girl. Lucile had always been a delightful chum, and Peggy loved her dearly.

"How much longer do you expect to remain away from Hubbold?" asked Lucile one morning at breakfast. Charlie looked up with a laugh.

"Exactly one month and ten days. By that time your cousin Charlie's exchequer will be drained dry. He'll have about enough money left to take his small family home again and feed them until he gets to work."

Lucile looked at him curiously.

"Supposing at the end of the month and ten days, you are not ready to go home?"

He knew what she meant; he glanced at Leila as he answered very simply:

"God is good."

"Why not ask father—"

"If necessary I know he will loan me all I need," said Charlie. "But—I don't think I will have to borrow."

"Borrow!" said Lucile, later in the day, as she set off with Peggy for the long walk they took every afternoon. "Charlie is worse than you are, Peggy."

"Well," said Peggy, serenely, "I thought you weren't going to argue with me any more? You know you always get angry when we begin."

"That's so," said Lucile, thoughtfully. "Say, Peggy, I have got a nasty temper, haven't I?"

"You'll never turn the other cheek," laughed Peggy.

Lucile went on beside her in silence for quite a while—then she said in a soft tone.

"You would."

"That's a question," said Peggy, brightly. "I might not at the right time. You see, Luce, the things you get angry at seem so little to me. For instance, that night so long ago, I was thinking of the disagreement with Mrs. Dulcimer, and how badly I felt that it should have caused coldness between you and Aunt Hannah. And just then came the news of little David's death and of Leila—" She filled up. "And the other thing seemed so tiny and trifling. That is the way, I guess, Lucile. A present trouble seems big until another comes and dwarfs it."

"Well, you Peggy!" said Lucile. "How can you be so

serious?" She shrugged her shoulders. "It must be the religion—I don't think I'd like that religion of yours, Peggy."

"No?" asked Peggy, quietly. But she said nothing else, and though Lucile looked at her once or twice interrogatively, the girl vouchsafed no word on the subject.

"You won't mind telling me when you first became a Catholic, will you?" asked Lucile, finally.

"Not at all. There was a mission held in St. Francis de Sales' chapel—the little one at the other end of Hubbold. I went twice with Leila, just to keep her company. She had no thought of converting me, and I was perfectly satisfied with the state I was in. I woke up."

"How did it feel?" asked the other girl, curiously.

"Just as if something new was put in the place where your heart had always been working at a jog-trot pace before," said Peggy, graphically. And then she changed the subject. "Let us take in the view from here, Lucile. I never grow tired of it, it is so beautiful."

They stood looking out over the beautiful lake, with the tall trees stretching in seemingly interminable rows back of it. Straight and tall they reared their heads, nor stooped to see themselves mirrored in the placid waters below. On the banks beautiful flowers were growing, for it was still summer-time, and the smell of the fresh green earth and the odor of the pines and the grandeur of the quiet scene struck delightfully upon one's senses. Lucile felt strangely moved. Something in her responded to the

beautiful vista spread before her. She said nothing—and Peggy, knowing her of old, did not interrupt her thoughts.

"Peggy," she said at last, in a voice that was full of feeling, "in the light of your religion, what does this say to you?"

"That God is love."

Lucile started violently—for it was not Peggy who answered her. She turned immediately in the direction of the voice. There, not six feet away from her, stood a young man, hat in hand, and with an expression of half-smiling, half-abashed apology on his very handsome face. He had been painting, evidently, for palette and brushes and sketch-book lay at his feet.

"Your pardon," he said now, in a low tone. "But the question seemed to supply the very answer I had framed to it. And your face," he bowed gravely; "your face completes the answer, and being but a humble artist, perhaps I ventured too much when I put it into speech."

Peggy, the lovable, the easily-pleased, stood proud and dignified beside the older girl, who was abashed, not so much at the speech, as at the look which so plainly conveyed the stranger's admiration.

"We are sorry to have interrupted you," said Peggy, in a frigid manner, then. "Come, Lucile, we must be going."

Lucile turned away with actual reluctance. The stranger watched them go, a peculiar expression on his face, ere he resumed his painting. It did not seem to occupy him as busily as it should, for ere long he laid the brush aside and threw himself down upon

the grass, pulling his hat over his eyes. There was a musing look in his eyes.

"She is certainly a very beautiful girl," he said aloud. "A—very—beautiful—girl!"

Meanwhile Lucile walked beside her cousin, much disturbed and agitated. What had the glowing eyes of the stranger said to her in that brief glance, before she had left him? What was it that his lips had not framed—in all probability never would frame?

"I think," said Peggy, without preamble, "that he was a very forward and bold young man."

Lucile started.

"Who? The artist?" She laughed with an affected lightness. "Artists are privileged characters."

"But not to look at a person as he looked at you," said Peggy, with decision.

So it had not been her fancy! Peggy, too, had observed the strangeness of that glance!

"Why, did he look at me in any way different to that—"

"Lucile, surely you noticed it. It really made me ashamed. I don't think he's nice; he's got a 'not-nice' appearance, really he has."

"Peggy, when will you get over your childish habit of judging people before they open their mouths?"

Peggy frowned.

"I can't help it. And I don't like that man—and if you

weren't going to marry Ted Saunders, the very thought that he was so near you would upset me dreadfully."

"Little cousin, don't be silly. And I'm not going to marry Ted Saunders."

Peggy smiled. "Not until he asks you," she said, "but he's ready when you're ready."

Lucile looked at her.

"He has asked me—and I'm not going to marry him," she said.

Peggy grew quite pale, and her lips twitched.

"Lucile!" she said. "You'll spoil his whole life."

Lucile shrugged her shoulders.

"No, Peggy, I won't. He doesn't care for me in the right way. I don't have to tell you what the difference is, but we're too much alike. He doesn't love me—as—Charlie does Leila, for instance."

"But, Lucile, you haven't given him the chance! Besides, a man like Charlie— And then Leila is delicate," she said, hurriedly to cover the pause, not wishing Lucile to think she drew comparisons. "If you needed him, I know Teddy Saunders would be satisfied to do all that he possibly could to make you happy."

"Come now, Peggy, do you think he would do as much for me as Charlie would for Leila?"

"Yes," said Peggy, frankly. "Not in the beginning, maybe —but afterward, when he got to know you, say as well as I do. One has to know you *well,* Lucile. On the surface you seem so

proud, and often bad-tempered. And you're not. People just say you are, and you think you are—and there you are!"

"A lucid explanation," said Lucile, absently. Her thoughts were back again with the artist who had looked at her with such admiration in his eyes.

"I wonder if—" she began.

"What do you wonder, Lucile?"

"Nothing," said Lucile.

She would have been ashamed to confess to Peggy the feeling that possessed her at that very moment. She could not forget the stranger's face, his manner, half-timid, it seemed to her, wholly admiring. She wondered if Peggy had not been there what the outcome of that meeting would have been. Would she have stayed longer; would she have talked to him—perhaps—

A crimson flush stained her cheeks, and she drew herself up proudly—angry at herself for the impression which an entire stranger had upon her, one whom she would in all probability never meet again. Could it be possible that Lucile Tarrant would have stooped to an ordinary flirtation with some poverty-stricken artist?

Poverty-stricken? No, he need not necessarily be that. Many people took up art for art's sake. . . . And it was not a flirtation. She was not anxious to speak to him again, save in so far as she might comprehend the look that had seemed to pierce her very soul. What was it Peggy had said about her religion? "Just as if something new had been put in the place where your

heart had always been working at a jog-trot pace before." Was that what this new, warm sensation filling her whole body meant?

"Lucile," said Peggy, very quietly, "are you sure you are not in love with Ted Saunders?"

Lucile started, gazing with astonished eyes at her cousin.

"Ted Saunders? I am pretty positive of it, Peggy—that I am *not* in love with him, I know. Why?"

"Because you have been so strange since we spoke of him—as if you regretted something," said Peggy. "Don't deceive yourself, Lucile—you might like him and not know it."

"No," said Lucile. "That won't happen to me—I won't like any one—and not know it."

She spoke quite slowly. They had turned now and were walking back to their hotel. As they drew near the spot where they had first seen the artist, Lucile suddenly became self-conscious, embarrassed, and furtively drew herself erect, her eyes straying through the trees. Perhaps he was still there—would he know that they were passing—would he look at her—

"There is that impudent fellow right in front of us," said Peggy, suddenly. "Lucile, what *does* ail you? You must be getting frightfully nervous—I never saw you act in such a manner! But come," she grasped her arm, "let us cut through here and we'll get out on the main road ahead of him. I don't want to overtake him, he might speak again—and there's something about him I dislike."

She tugged at Lucile's arm as she spoke and the other had no

choice but to obey. With swift feet Peggy tore through the little path, dragging Lucile after her. They did indeed come out on the main road a good bit ahead of the artist, who was sauntering along at a leisurely pace. His face kindled when he saw the two girls emerge from the path. He recognized them immediately.

"They're in a great hurry," was his mental comment. That was all. He began to whistle a pretty melody under his breath, nor did he increase his pace, although he kept them in sight all the way. As they turned in the direction of their hotel a pleased smile lighted up his face.

"Same hotel! That's good," he said. "It will be very engaging. But I must first discover who she of the lovely eyes may be." He went to the clerk as soon as he entered. "There were two young ladies just came through here—you saw them?"

"Yes," said the clerk, looking at him expectantly.

"I think I recognized the younger—but I do not like to claim acquaintanceship if I am mistaken," he said. "May I ask you her name?"

"The youngest one is Miss Margaret Stanton—the other, I think, Miss Lucile Tarrant. Relatives, I believe. Both of Hubbold."

"Thank you—they are not the same, although I know a young Mr. Tarrant of Hubbold. I daresay she has a brother?"

"Not here, sir."

"Very well—and thank you again."

But when he walked away a puzzled expression flitted across

his face. "Tarrant!" he said; "if it's that young cub, they're pretty well fixed. I must find out. Hubbold—where's Hubbold? By Jove, but she *is* pretty, and no mistake about it. I wonder if Will Tarrant is her brother?"

He meant to find out at the earliest opportunity, resolving, if he could get the young lady alone, to make his inquiries in person.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEGINNING.

CHANCE took the reins in her hands in the artist's favor. Before dinner that evening, Lucile, who had taken particular pains to appear at her best—perhaps with a half-confessed desire that she might meet the young man whose glance had so engaged her attention—came down to the veranda and sat in one of the big porch rockers, waiting for Peggy. She was lost in a day-dream, when a soft voice at her elbow seemed to drift in with her thoughts. She was not surprised that he should be there, leaning over her; and she knew if she raised her eyes that she would meet that disturbing glance once more.

"Miss Tarrant," he said, in melodious tones, "I have discovered within the last few hours that you and my friend Will Tarrant are brother and sister. Permit me to introduce myself? My name is Paul Noble—and a few years ago Will and I made a hunting trip together through the Adirondacks."

By this time Lucile had recovered her self-possession.

"Oh—I remember Will spoke of a Mr. Noble at that time—and are you he? How delightful!" She lifted her pretty flushed face. "You may be glad to hear that Will is coming for a week

or so. Let me see, to-day is Thursday—he will probably be here Sunday morning."

"That's what I call a streak of good luck," said Noble. "I was trying to get up the old congenial crowd once more for a mountain expedition—and if Will joins us—Sunday, did you say? That will be very fine. I shall try to persuade him. Perhaps you may be kind enough, if it is necessary, to add your voice to mine?"

"Oh, indeed!" said Lucile, "you won't need my voice—there is surely nothing he would enjoy better."

"He is not occupied?"

Lucile smiled.

"Will never is—unless doing nothing."

"Rather hard on Will!" laughed Paul Noble. "He used to relate some stories of an aunt—your aunt—" he paused interrogatively, but Lucile did not fill in the break. "I have forgotten the name. A queer old character! But interesting. Is she here with you? I should like to meet her—"

"You may, sometime, if you are good," said Lucile. "Aunt Hannah is dead."

"Dead!" He did not know what to reply to this, but flashed a keen glance at her. Was she in joking humor as the first words implied, or did she expect him to speak words of commiseration? Lucile's face was absolutely expressionless; she had indeed recovered herself.

"Old people are very trying," he ventured.

"Is that so?" asked Lucile, in surprised tones. "I was not aware of the fact."

"Some old people," he qualified immediately.

"Oh, perhaps. Some are lovable."

"I daresay—in spite of their peculiarities." He laughed. "I can not speak from experience—I have never had any very old relatives. Most of our family die young."

"Sometimes the young die good," murmured Lucile.

Again he looked at her, but this time with newly-awakened interest in his eyes as well as admiration. This beautiful girl had a ready tongue—and that at least meant she would not be dull. And it was with this expression on his face that Peggy Stanton saw the two together. Now Peggy was a girl of sudden antipathies and she disliked this man very much, in spite of his handsome face and excessively polite manners. That was the trouble—his politeness seemed such an effort. She hesitated in the doorway, looking at them, and the man glancing up from the contemplation of Lucile's brown head met that gaze of actual disgust, and held it. Held it long enough to return it with interest. Peggy's head flew up in the air, and a spot of red sprang into either cheek. She did not advance on to the porch, but spoke to Lucile from the open door.

"Are you ready, Lucile?" she asked. "Leila and Charlie are waiting for us."

Lucile rose languidly.

"Oh, is it you, Peggy?" She glanced from Paul Noble to

the girl. "Permit me? This gentleman has introduced himself as Mr. Noble—a friend of Will's. He was with him on that hunting trip we heard so much of some years ago."

"Is that so?" murmured Peggy. She bowed very frigidly, and looked at Lucile expectantly. "Do hurry, Lucile—Charlie wishes to take Leila for a drive before it gets too late. She can't be out after nine."

"Pray pardon me?" said Lucile to Mr. Noble. His face, his eyes, spoke volumes—and once more that strange sensation went through her whole body. Inside she grasped Peggy's arm. Her fingers were cold.

"Peggy! did you ever see any one so handsome, so splendid?" she said, in a low voice. "There is something in his face—"

Much astonished, Peggy drew away from the excited girl.

"Lucile!"

But Lucile, after that first outburst, grew angry at herself and said no more on the subject.

At dinner Paul Noble was seated where he could watch her. Her eyes were brilliant, her lips red, her face flushed. More than once people turned to stare at her. Charlie remarked on her appearance with a laugh.

"I think Lakewood agrees better with Lucile than anybody. I have never seen her look so well."

"Perhaps I am better adapted to shine in a crowd than to vegetate in the wilderness."

"Oh, is that it?" laughed Charlie. "I'll believe it if you

grow dull after we get home. But I think it's being in love with Ted Saunders. Uncle Tarrant wrote me"—he never called him David since his little boy's death—"about Ted. What was the objection, Lucile? Just giving him a test or two? You girls are great at that."

"Did Leila?" mischievously.

"Oh, Leila! I sha'n't tell you how Leila treated me." He looked affectionately at his wife, who smiled. "I have too much sympathy for my fellow-man."

"Leila," said Peggy, solemnly, "I want lessons."

"Dear!" said Leila. "Every member of the sex is a different species of wild animal—"

"First catch your hare," put in Lucile with a laugh.

"Then skin him," said Charlie.

"Of course—the married man!" cried Peggy. "The much-abused married man! I wonder who is hare and who is hound—before the unhappy bachelor becomes the much-abused married man?"

In nonsense such as this the dinner hour passed off pleasantly enough. They were comrades, with the easy attitude toward one another of people who have known each other long and intimately. Recollections of past jolly times, of people whom all knew, of prophecies of the future, kept them in a glow of talk and innocent fun all during the meal. Many envied them the peaceful happiness, the capacity for enjoyment that seemed to be theirs—and Paul Noble looked toward them wistfully more than once, think-

ing how enjoyable it would be to sit and bask in Lucile's smiles; listening to the words she spoke which seemed so to amuse the others. But Lucile was, apparently, totally oblivious of his presence. Nor did she see him again that night.

Will Tarrant came Sunday morning—the genial, happy-go-lucky, lazy Will Tarrant, and Paul Noble employed the intervening days in making himself agreeable to Charlie Stanton. This was not a hard task, for any one more open or less suspicious than Charlie would be hard to find. By discreet questioning Paul discovered that Lucile's father was now the owner of the Hubbold Mills. And after that he carefully planned a campaign for himself which would have done credit to a general. Will Tarrant, coming to a strange place, would have been glad to make friends at once with any one—and to meet Noble, whom he remembered well, was a pleasure. He listened with delight to the account of the last mountain trips, Noble, who was quite a sportsman, had taken—and he volunteered at once to join the party of six men any time they were ready.

So for a week young Tarrant and Noble were inseparable, and Lucile saw little of them. Whereupon, this not suiting her at all, she spoke to her brother.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't give us some of your society," she remarked, crisply. "You haven't spoken three words to Peggy since you came."

"Oh, yes, I have," he declared. "Only Noble's such a good chap, you know, one just hates to lose any of him. Say, he's fine,

Lucile. If he wasn't a woman-hater I'd ask him to join our crowd."

"A woman-hater! The very idea!" cried Lucile. "I don't believe it."

Will shrugged his shoulders.

"He'll never come near you girls—I've asked him time and time again, and he refuses. Often if he's with me and sees you coming, he'll turn around and go another way. He says he thinks he offended you the first day he met you—"

"Why, Will, he didn't do anything of the sort! Peggy don't like him, I know that for a fact. He spoke to me—I'm sure he intended no offense—it would be too silly." She looked at him keenly. "I don't want to talk about Mr. Noble and his thoughts," she went on with a fine assumption of unconcern. "I'd rather talk of you. Will, why *don't* you be nice to Peggy? She's such a sweet little thing, and I know that father would just be happy forever after if you and she could fall in love and marry."

Will squared his shoulders and met his sister's eyes.

"Lady Peggy's about the only girl could straighten me out," he said.

"See! I knew it! If you're not a goose, Will, to lose such a lot of time!"

"Am I? You just ask Lady Peggy. Are you aware that she's a Catholic?"

"Pshaw! Charlie wasn't a Catholic when Leila married him."

"Never mind about that part of it. I've told Lady Peggy all that—in fact, I proposed to her right before Aunt Hannah died—before she came out to Lakewood. I'm quite soft on Lady Peggy, Lucile."

"You proposed! No!" breathlessly. "And what did she say?"

"Lots of things," gloomily.

"Among which—"

"Among which was the fact of her religion—Scorcher No. 1. Second, that relatives don't marry within third degree of kindred—law of the Church, you see—Scorcher No. 2. And thirdly, that if there wasn't another man on the face of this earth she'd never want to be tied to any one as lazy as I am—Scorcher No. 3. And by Jingo, she's right, and I respect her for her opinion. Besides—"

"Well?" Lucile was keenly interested. "Well? Do go on, Will?"

"Don't say anything to her, Luce?"

"On my word, Will."

"I think she likes Teddy."

"NO!"

"Honest Injun, I think she does like him."

"Oh, I hope so, Will. He's a fine fellow—and he and Peggy would get along nicely—they'd be just suited to each other, I'm sure."

"That's all right—when you were just saying how fine a

couple she and I would make! But you've really turned him down, Lucile? For good?"

"I don't love him, Will—I couldn't marry him."

The brother shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "I'll tell you something else if you'll keep your mouth closed."

"Yes?"

"I think Noble's head over heels in love with either you or Lady Peggy—I can't find out which."

"Peggy, of course!" she said, laughing, although her voice trembled. Will shook his head.

"No, I wouldn't say that. But when I go to talk of you he shuts me off—he won't let me, Lucile. And he seems so downhearted—it's a pity. He's A1, too," went on this garrulous young man; "he knows more about traps than most of the Adirondack guides put together, and he's a fine shot, and he's as keen on a scent as an animal himself. By Jove, I like him, Lucile."

"That's good," said Lucile, shrugging her shoulders indifferently. "Men who make good companions on a hunting trip are not as likely to make good companions for life."

"Why not?" asked Will. "That's no way to judge a fellow. No one's wanting you to like him. I'm sure *I* ain't. He would be the last one to ask a chap to put in a good word for him—he's very independent all around, I guess—on the money question, too. He's got plenty of it, I believe."

This conversation might have had some effect on the girl's future conduct. She met Paul Noble that night as she entered

one of the parlors in quest of her cousins. He drew aside and let her pass—one glance told her that none of her party was in the room. She stopped then, and looked up into the man's face.

"May I venture to say a word or two?" she asked, brightly. "My brother informed me the other day that you were laboring under a false impression in regard to me."

"I—I? In what way?"

"That you imagined that you had offended me that day at the lake—when you spoke—" She flushed. "I am not offended, Mr. Noble."

He started forward, eagerly.

"No? Then why have you been so cold, so haughty, so—Oh, I beg, I beg your pardon, Miss Lucile. I have no right to ask such questions."

"That is true," she said, gravely, and the honesty of her eyes should have shamed him—but he did not recognize that clear honesty, he had been too long a stranger to it. "Nevertheless, I have not been cold or haughty, as you put it. I simply saw that you wished to avoid us, and gave you every opportunity of doing so."

"Will you permit me to speak to you, to occasionally converse with you?" he said, quickly. "Prove to me that you are not offended. It is beautiful outside. The moonlight is framing the world in silver, and there is the soul of a poet in you. Come out with me, and tell me what the moonlight says to you."

Lucile, with a soft little smile on her lips, laid her hand on his arm, and turned with him out into the glorious summer night.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOVE OF LUCILE.

PEGGY was angry, Peggy was furiously angry, and Peggy in a temper was a sight given to few mortals, because when things went wrong she usually locked herself in her room and fought out all her trouble until she was sure that she could be civil to those around her. But now her blue eyes fairly scorched the abashed young man standing before her and her fine little head was set at a dangerous angle.

"It's all your fault," she was saying. "Every bit of it, Will Tarrant. You gave that man the countenance of praise, and associated with him, and now your sister and he are in love with each other. It doesn't matter much with him," contemptuously. "I know what sort of love *his* love is. But Lucile!"

"Lady Peggy, if you'll let me get a word in—"

"I will not—you haven't any word to get in. Here's Lucile in love with a man—*like that!*" No words could describe the scorn in her voice. "Yes—and who is he? You don't know—he might have a dozen wives. Who are his people? Where does he come from? What will Uncle Tarrant say when he finds out—"

"Say, Peggy, wait a minute. Can't you give Lucile credit for better sense? She's only teaching him a lesson—"

Peggy opened her eyes wide.

"Teaching him a lesson! Who told you that?"

"She did. In the beginning she told me just that. You know he'd always been a woman-hater and she's raising him, that's all. Don't you understand? She's not a bit in love with him, Peggy."

"Oh, Will, do not believe it—I know otherwise."

"He could do a great sight worse than Lucile," said Will Tarrant.

"Worse—than—Lucile!" Peggy flared up again. "What have you got in your head in place of brains, Will? I think the great Lord made you a living example of what can be done with sawdust."

"Keep on, Peggy."

"Oh, Will, I mean it. Lucile is in love for the first time in her life."

"But, Peggy, such nonsense! Why do you think so?"

"I know Lucile. She's in love with that man, and he's not worth even her little finger. I don't suppose she'll marry him—Uncle Tarrant will take care of that—but I doubt if she ever gets over it. I always imagined Lucile would be just that way—it's too cruel!" finished Peggy, with a break in her voice. "Why couldn't she have married Ted Saunders and let him make her happy?"

The little catch in her throat melted good-natured Will Tarrant at once. He caught her hand in his and held it.

"Lady Peggy," he said, softly. "A girl can do a lot with a man, and maybe if Noble is in earnest, Lucile could do worse than have him. She might make just such a fellow as he is a good wife—Teddy Saunders is too much like herself. Peggy, dear little cousin," gently, "you know what I am, and you know how disgusted dad is with me, but honest, if there were only some way in which you could make up your mind to have me, I know I'd—"

"Don't talk like that," said Peggy, sharply. "If I loved you so much that I thought you the best and greatest and grandest fellow ever lived; if I thought I could make you a hero or a saint —or—or—the President of the United States, I *couldn't* marry you. My Church will not permit it and you're my first cousin—almost my brother—and I won't do it. Besides that, I couldn't marry you, for I don't love you and I never can. And let that settle it all, Will, and let us get back to Lucile, for if you knew how anxious I am, and how I dislike that dreadful man, with his horrid eyes, and his smile that Lucile calls 'heavenly'—and—and—that nasty, thick, horrid, black mustache—"

Words failed Peggy. Temper and grief welled up in her again, only this time they brought the tears to her eyes, and she sat down suddenly with her handkerchief to her face. Will Tarrant could only stare at her helplessly. Then a sudden idea struck him.

"Peggy, listen—I'll tell you what I'll do. Stop crying, Peggy, stop crying, and listen. Straighten up."

She wiped her eyes, blew her little nose, and looked at him.

"I'll telegraph father to telegraph us to come home—that he's lonesome—if you'll come with us and explain. If I tried to do it father would think me crazy."

"And what will he think of me?" she asked involuntarily.

"Oh, he'll listen to every word *you* say, Madam Sensible. But Peggy, if Noble really likes Lucile and follows us to Hubbold and makes things right with dad—"

"He won't, he can't! Will," she drew nearer and spoke in a whisper, "Leila told me the other day that *she can't bear him!* And when Leila says a thing like that about any one I'm afraid there's no hope for him."

"Neither do I—Leila could be gentle to Judas, I think," said Will, warmly. "No, Peggy, we'll stop matters here, and if they come to a crisis at home, well, it won't be our fault, honey. Only you'll have to come with us, that's all. Leila and Charlie will return in a few weeks—and father has been getting The Laurels ready for them. It wouldn't do for Leila to go back to their own house after David—"

"Uncle Tarrant is a darling," interjected Peggy.

"So you can oversee the furnishing and all that, and fix things up the way Leila likes them. She's pretty well now, isn't she?"

"Never was better in her life." Peggy sat very still. "If

I never loved my brother, I'd have to fairly idolize him for what he's been to Leila. It would have taught any among us a good lesson. Why, she was a child, her heart almost broken, her brain benumbed, her whole life spoiled—" Peggy shook her head. "Thank God for my brother Charlie; and thank God he is a Catholic, and that I am one, too. Nothing, nothing in the world can do a person good when trouble comes, but faith in God."

Will Tarrant looked at her glowing face, and something like ambition fired his aimless soul.

"Peggy, where do you get all your fine little thoughts from?"

"Fine little thoughts! Don't be absurd!" said Peggy, scornfully. "I just wish I had words for what I want to say—about Charlie and about Leila, and—and—about their love for each other, and their faith and all that. You don't want fine thoughts when a calamity like David's death tears your very heart in two; you just want to fling yourself right into the fire of God's love and let it burn the pain away."

"Peggy," said Will, despairingly, "*don't* you think you could marry me?"

But Peggy would not listen; only laughed at him with the tears of emotion still in her eyes, and ran off.

"You'll come?" he called after her. "You'll come if I arrange it?"

"Yes," called Peggy back again. "Yes, I'll come."

* * * * *

Lucile Tarrant was much annoyed when Will brought her the telegram from her father, summoning them home. There was no cause for alarm. "Just lonesome," had been added to the message. Nevertheless, despite her annoyance, her heart was tender; she was much sweeter and gentler than she had ever been in all her life. She yearned to see her father, to put her arms about him, to caress him. Yet some tie bound her to this place.

She would not confess that it was Paul Noble. She would not confess her love for him even then, though she listened for his step and his presence made her happy. But they were walking quietly under the pines when she told him that they had been summoned to return, and her heart gave a leap of joy when he stood still, seized her arm and tried to meet her eyes.

"Home!" he said. "You are going home—you are going home—you will leave—me?"

He said no more for a little while, and though her face was flushed and her eyes bright in anticipation of what his next words would be she was glad that he did not speak—glad to be able to understand without spoken words. At last they came.

"Lucile," he said, "I love you."

She did not answer him.

"I love you. I shall not ask you if you love me—I dare not. I have nothing to give you, not even earnestness. I live from to-day until to-morrow. I have been a Bohemian all my life, expect to be one all the rest of it. I can not ask you to share my lot—I have no lot to share," bitterly. "But I can tell you that

you are the sweetest and best girl I ever met—and that I love you."

Lucile looked at him, a smile parting her lips.

"You mean that you are poor?"

"I am poor, yes. And I have always been glad of it until now."

"But I am not poor."

He shrugged his shoulders. They had come to the path where she had first met him—and now stood side by side looking out over the lake. They were alone—and Lucile, stirred by the soft stillness of the scene, and by the emotions filling her own heart, turned and looked up into his eyes.

"If you love me—really love me—could you let me go away from you?" she asked, simply.

"You are going away from me," he answered. "I can not keep you."

"But you can follow."

"To what end? If you cared—"

"You have not asked me if I cared."

He was very quiet for a few minutes, not looking at her. In spite of himself, then, his eyes sought her face; studied its sweetness, its beauty, its goodness. Something like a sigh parted his lips. For once in his reckless life Paul Noble felt an impulse toward higher things; he felt called upon to reach this girl's level. With this feeling full upon him, he placed his hand upon her shoulder and she raised her honest eyes to his.

"Lucile," he said, "do you love me?"

She did not flinch, although her face flushed crimson under his gaze. She did not drop her lids, but looked at him with the light of steady purpose on her face.

"Yes," she said.

He had meant to win her, he had endeavored by every art in his power to make her care—and now he felt ashamed. He turned his head away and covered his face with his hands. She stood waiting for him to speak to her—she would add nothing to that simple confession. He had asked a question—she had answered it. The rest depended upon him.

"Lucile, I am not worthy," he said. "I am not worthy."

"It is too late to think of that now," she said, gently.

"You love me well enough to marry me?"

"Yes."

"And if I come after you—to Hubbold—to your home—you will receive me; you will let me try to prove myself—"

She gave him her hand then, with a smile.

"You may do all three," she said. "And now let us go back again. Only—this is my good-by to you."

"You mean it is good-by until we meet again."

"Until we meet again!"

He carried her two hands to his lips, kissing them over and over.

"And," she added, gently, "the Lord watch between me and thee until that happy hour."

He dropped her hands.

"You are too good," he said, in a voice of emotion. "Lucile, Lucile, you are too good, dear. Better for you that hour never comes."

With a gesture of indescribable tenderness she put her fingers on his arm.

"Whether it be long or short in coming—whether it be a week, or month, or never, God have you in His keeping until then."

And so Paul Noble, with the prize he had worked for in his grasp, walked home beside her. Not exultant; shamed, rather; shamed and silent.

CHAPTER VIII.

CALAMITY.

THEY were in the Hall again—and Peggy was under the roof that had sheltered her for so many years. The first few days were spent in sorrowful reminiscences of her dead aunt. She had been home a week before she ventured to go to the old room, the only one, by the way, which had not been altered; and when finally she did go, she could not keep back her emotion, crying as if her heart would break. When she left it she was scarcely in a mood to encounter Mrs. Tarrant. But Mrs. Tarrant, standing on the threshold of her own apartments, waited until the girl came near her, and when she spoke her tones surprised Peggy.

"You have not been to see me," she said, very gently. "Yet I expected you, Peggy."

"Oh!" faltered Peggy. "They told me you were not well. And I did not want to bother you."

"Bother me!" Mrs. Tarrant smiled, and the smile lighted up her whole face. "Come inside, Peggy, child, and sit down, and tell me about Lakewood. And how is Leila? And Charlie? And is Leila getting better?"

Thoroughly mystified, Peggy followed her Aunt Mary, and

sat down in the chair she placed for her. There was a slightly bewildered expression on her face, and she looked at Mrs. Tarrant, questioningly, noticing the shrunken aspect of her figure, and the accentuation of features that had always been inclined to thinness. Peggy's heart was as big as her little body, so the wonderment gave way to pity now.

"You are *not* well!" she exclaimed. "Aunt Mary, I think you need a change of scene. You have no idea what good it does, honestly. One would scarcely know Lucile—"

"I don't want to speak of Lucile," said Mrs. Tarrant. "Tell me of yourself. And after that, I'm going to talk about you, Peggy, and I hope you'll listen to me."

"Why, of course," said Peggy, with animation. And then she told her, as she had requested, about Charlie and Leila and of Leila's health and of Lakewood, and of Will Tarrant. When she reached this last subject, Mrs. Tarrant glanced at her, smiling.

"That's what I want to listen to," she said. "Peggy, Will tells me he has asked you to marry him."

"Yes," said Peggy. "He has."

"I wish you would marry him."

"I can't, Aunt Mary. I am a Catholic."

"That doesn't matter."

"It does matter."

"I tell you it doesn't. I can't understand such folly on your part, Peggy. He is in love with you; he would make you a good husband, and you could do just as you pleased with him— That

is an advantage," smiling. "I have found it so with your Uncle David."

"Perhaps it is," said Peggy, with spirit, "but it's an advantage some one else can have. I don't want it."

"There are other things. You and Charlie are comparatively poor now—Charlie has to work under David. If you and Will were married you could see that Charlie—"

"I wish you wouldn't talk to me in that strain," said Peggy. "I can't marry Will—we are first cousins. Our Church forbids it—I'm sick and tired telling him that—why doesn't he believe me? As for money—well," she laughed, "I think I have proven that I don't want money." It was the only allusion she had ever made to her refusal of Aunt Hannah's legacy. Mrs. Tarrant grew very pale.

"You may change your mind if ever you feel the need of it."

"While there's honest work to be done by honest hands I shall never feel the need of it," said Peggy, with meaning.

Mrs. Tarrant looked at her sharply.

"We'll come back to this subject again," she said, after a moment. "Think it over. Think how your refusal will work against your own future—and perhaps injure Charlie—"

Flaring with indignation, Peggy sprang to her feet—but before she could speak her aunt put up her hand wearily.

"I am tired," she said.

In the hall Peggy met her Uncle David—and would have run past him, but that he caught her by the arm.

"Where are you going, Lady Peggy?" he asked, using Will's favorite name for her.

"Some place where I can just fight out my temper by myself," said Peggy. "I have been angry twice within the last two weeks—I must be growing frightfully wicked. Let me go, Uncle David—"

"But don't you think it's time to make that explanation you've been putting off for a week? I'm getting curious."

"I'll come back in half an hour and explain everything," said Peggy, desperately. "Yes, I will, if you'll only let me go now."

"All right," laughingly. "I'll be in the music-room. Lucile's gone for a walk."

She kept her word. In half an hour she returned to him. He threw aside his book, pulling her down upon his knee, and putting his arm as caressingly about her as if she had been Lucile herself.

"You want to know why Will sent you the telegram? You'll think us very foolish, Uncle David."

"Go on—let me judge."

"Well, there was a man there—Paul Noble, his name is. Will knew him before, and he and Lucile were so much together, and Lucile, I could see, was just falling desperately in love with him and we all disliked him. Even Leila did—think of it. *Leila* did. So I scolded Will and he got the idea of sending the telegram on condition that I'd explain it. That's the explanation, and don't

scold. If that man likes Lucile well enough, he'll follow her, and you can just squelch him, Uncle David—I know you will, for he's horrid. I've waited this whole week before saying anything, thinking he'd want to come."

"My dear, are you sure you are fair to him?"

"There's nothing to be fair about," said Peggy, with an earnestness that made her uncle laugh. "You'll think so, too. Of course, he'll come here—just let him, if he pleases, and I know you'll dislike him as much as we do."

"But, Peggy," very gravely, "Peggy, Peggy, do you think Lucile cares for him?"

"Uncle David, I'm afraid—she did."

"If she did, she does. Something good in him must attract her. Remember, each eye looks at people in its own peculiar way, and because *you* dislike him— You have no reasons to do so, Peggy?"

"None," she confessed. "Only, uncle, he's horrid."

"Lucile has good judgment," gravely. "Why doesn't she think so?"

"You don't mean—Uncle David—you don't mean you would take his part?" aghast.

"No—and—yes. If I think him fair and honest, and if he loves Lucile and she loves him, well, Peggy, one has no right to judge by impressions. Impressions count for nothing—not even Lucile's that he is a paragon, if he turns out the dreadful fellow you picture him."

But despite this example of his own fairness and his honesty, when Paul Noble came—which, true to Peggy's prediction, he did the following week, David Tarrant owned to a secret sympathy with her dislike. He made the man welcome, placed the hospitality of their home at his command—and, after that, watched matters as they developed. He felt that Noble should bring things to a crisis, that Noble should declare his intentions, tell him what he proposed doing, give his credentials as to his respectability.

But Noble did none of these things.

He had come, ostensibly, as Will's invited guest. Will had received a letter from him and Will had answered it, after consulting his father, cordially asking him to spend a few weeks with them. And Noble came and Will saw little of him. He was Lucile's shadow. At the end of the first week, when Mr. Tarrant had heard nothing from his guest and daughter's possible lover, he wrote very quietly to a firm of lawyers with whom he had transactions in the Western city which Paul Noble declared to be his birthplace. Awaiting a reply, he let things take their course. He was cordial, open, and if a slight reserve rather chilled the heartiness of his manner at times, that might be put down to shortness of acquaintance.

The day that was to be such a portentous one for them all dawned at last. Mr. Tarrant said nothing when he broke open the letter for which he had been waiting three full weeks now; the days were passing and Noble was still present. Several

times he had spoken of leaving and going to the hotel in the town proper, but there was a general demur. Now, Mr. Tarrant read his letter through, folded it again, replaced it in its envelope. He was very pleasant, indeed, but Peggy noticed that he ate no breakfast. She was much worried at the way affairs were going. Leila and Charlie were at home in The Laurels, Mr. Tarrant's old dwelling, and her place was ready for her with them, but she felt that to leave would be to deprive Lucile of some sort of protection. She treated Noble with bare civility, nothing more, and he reciprocated in kind, for he had little liking for this fearless, contemptuous young girl.

"Will you come into the library before you go out this morning, Mr. Noble?" asked Mr. Tarrant, very quietly, as they rose from the table. "I have something to say to you."

"Certainly," said Paul Noble.

The simple words affected every one of the party excepting Will Tarrant. He glanced expectantly at Peggy, but her eyes were on her uncle's face. Lucile flushed a little. Her lover looked at her with a question in his eyes. Then he followed Mr. Tarrant at once.

It was an unpleasant moment for both men. Paul Noble expected what was coming, but Mr. Tarrant was much distressed.

"Mr. Noble," he said gravely, "the courtesy and hospitality of my home have been yours for several weeks. I regret very much at having to ask you to read this letter and to explain the accusations contained therein."

Paul Noble took the letter. He started when he recognized the lawyers' names, and saw the city from which it had arrived.

"They say that you come of a good family; but that you have gambled away all of your inheritance; that you drink very heavily, and that your associates have not always been men of law and order."

Paul Noble shrugged his shoulders.

"Does what I have been in the past count against me?" he asked. "Am I to have no chance for a future?"

"You are thinking of a future, then?" questioned Mr. Tarrant.

"Yes," said Paul Noble, boldly. "Give me Lucile, and I shall show you—show every one, what I can make of myself."

Mr. Tarrant smiled.

"A modest request," he said, with sarcasm. "You must imagine I am anxious to get rid of my daughter. I would think quite a while before giving her to any man, but to you— We will consider the matter closed."

"You refuse to consent to my marriage with Lucile?"

"I have not listened to any such request from you—nor do I intend to listen, sir. Your audacity is unparalleled. Let me remind you that a man, if he had any honor left, with a record like this back of him," he struck the paper sharply, "would not presume to ask the hand of such a girl as Lucile Tarrant without first trying to prove to the world that he has attempted to be worthy of her. If your love, sir, is the right kind of love, you

will take yourself away immediately, set to work to live down this character, turn over a new leaf, begin again, prove yourself. If you come back at the end of a few years and show me a clean record I will consider the matter—that is, if Lucile has not changed her mind."

"But—"

"Sir, I have spoken my last word. Believe me I have only said this much because I fear that Lucile has become attached to you. I know my daughter, and you can rest assured that when I show her this letter—"

"You will show her this letter—"

"Excepting on certain conditions."

Noble folded his arms doggedly.

"Name them."

"Go away—at once—make what explanation you care to and what promises. Go, and try to make a man of yourself. Keep away. Let me hear from you if you wish—I shall be glad to. But do not speak to Lucile until you have done your best to be worthy of her. On these conditions I shall not show her this letter."

"A clever scheme to get rid of me," said Noble, moodily.

"Allow me to bid you good morning," said Mr. Tarrant. Inwardly he was fuming. The man appeared in so contemptible a light! Had he been humble, had he asked time, had he pleaded any sort of weakness, Mr. Tarrant would have listened. sympathized with, helped him.

"You may make your daughter very wretched—have you thought of that?" asked Noble.

"Single wretchedness is more bearable than double misery," said Mr. Tarrant. "You must understand, being a man of the world— *What was that?*"

For at that moment a shot rang through the house; there was the sound of a heavy body falling in the room above them—falling with a thud that seemed to shake the floor beneath them. Mr. Tarrant stared at Paul Noble, and his face turned to a sickly pallor. He held on to the table for support, his chin falling on his breast.

"That was in the gun-room," he said. "My wife— You heard—"

"An accident," said Noble, briefly. "Let us find out what has happened."

"My wife," repeated Mr. Tarrant; his limbs were trembling. "She has not been well—"

But at that moment a piercing scream rang through the hall above them. Shriek after shriek fell upon the air, and then words became distinguishable.

"Is there a curse upon me—is there a curse upon me? Will, my son, my son, my son!"

CHAPTER IX.

LUCILE AND HER FATHER.

"Is there a curse upon me?"

Those who ran at the sound of Mrs. Tarrant's screams never forgot the sight that met their eyes. She was kneeling on the floor, with her son's head upon her breast, blood streaming from a wound in the forehead. The gun lying beside them, the oil and rags with which he had been cleaning it, told the occasion of the frightful accident. The bullet had gone straight through the brain and death had been instantaneous. The effect of that scene filled every one with horror. They stood transfixed, too awed to move, while the mother still knelt with her son in her arms.

"O God, I am accursed! O God, I am accursed!" she moaned, over and over.

Truly, it seemed as if misfortune had taken up its abode with the Tarrants. Leila's protracted illness, little David's sudden death, and Aunt Hannah's. After which, most frightful of all, came—this. No wonder David Tarrant covered his face with his hands, bitter moans bursting from his lips, his chest heaving. No wonder Lucile stood with staring eyes and ashen face—or that

Peggy crouched close against the door holding to it for support, her gaze fastened on the distorted features of the young man who, not half an hour before, had left her with a gay word on his lips.

Paul Noble was the first to recover himself.

He advanced to Mrs. Tarrant's side, and stooping, took her son from her. She pushed him off with the gesture of a madwoman. But he bent and looked straight at her, and held her gaze, and as she watched him, half-fascinated, he loosened her fingers and gently placed the young man on the floor, closing the lids over the upturned eyes and decently composing the limbs, knowing that in a very little while it would be impossible to do so. Not one moved, not a word was said, while he acted in this manner, and all his attention was riveted, apparently, upon the mother. She seemed to be cowed by his glance. Then he lifted her to her feet, and took her in his arms as if she had been a child.

"Show me her room," he said to Peggy. Peggy was as near to liking him then as she ever got. Trembling violently, she led the way to Mrs. Tarrant's room and entering he placed her upon the bed.

"Tell Mr. Tarrant to come," he said. "He must stay with her. And telephone for the physician."

Peggy flew to obey him. One message she did not have to give, for Mr. Tarrant was following them; Peggy went downstairs to call up Dr. Spencer, and Paul Noble gave place to the stricken father, who could merely fall heavily into a chair. He reached over and clasped his wife's hands, checking the bitter

moans that had been falling from his lips in the presence of the fright and horror on her face.

Then Paul Noble left them. Lucile was standing in the same position as when her mother's scream startled her, and brought her to the gun-room. She was staring down at her brother's prostrate form. Noble put both his arms about her and his lips sought her forehead.

"My Lucile! My darling!" he said, tenderly.

"He is—dead?" she whispered.

"Yes, dear. Come away—this is no place for you."

"Paul, please, please look? He may not be dead—just look."

"Lucile, there is no use."

"To satisfy me?"

"To satisfy you?" He released her instantly, and went over to Will's side. The face of the unfortunate young man was quite cold; the limbs were already stiffening. Unbuttoning his vest, Paul Noble placed his hand upon the quiet heart. Then, feeling in the pocket of the light house coat he found a white handkerchief. He shook it from its folds and spread it very gently across the peaceful face.

Lucile watched him in utter silence. Not one of his movements escaped her. When he rose from the ground slowly and stood looking down at what had been, so short a while before, a form instinct with life and health, a quiver shot through him. Still Lucile watched. He went to her side and held out his hand to her.

"Will you come now, Lucile?" he asked, simply.

She covered her eyes with her fingers.

"Lucile!" he said, in passionate tones, "I would to heaven I were lying right there—I would to heaven it had been my worthless self—"

"Oh, no!" she clung to him, then, sobbing. "Oh, do not talk so—do not talk so—you do not know what you are saying. Oh, Paul, my brother, my poor brother!"

He put his arms around her fiercely.

"Dearest!" he said. "Dearest! Be brave, come away."

She permitted him to lead her from the apartment, down the stairs, and into the morning-room. She sank into a chair and he knelt beside her.

"I meant to have been on my way by this," he said. "But now I shall stay while I can be of service to you. After that—"

"After that?" She looked at him with terror. "What do you mean?"

"I am sent away, Lucile. I must leave you."

"But why?"

"I am not worthy of you. I have nothing to offer you. Therefore I must go."

"My father said that? My father? But he does not understand—he does not know that I have promised to marry you, Paul; that I love you. Did you tell him that?"

"No, Lucile—I could not. Nor must you—not, at any rate while I remain."

"And you are going—actually going?" she asked in a bated voice.

"Yes."

"But you have said—"

"Lucile, I know. I shall write to you—I shall see you again, but not here. I shall arrange it so that I can see you. But at present we must not talk of these things—not while there is such trouble. Your father is right—I have nothing. I must go away until I can do what he expects me to. But I shall come back, Lucile; I shall come back to you, dear. Be true to me."

Her face hardened, her eyes were flashing.

"Because you have nothing!" she said. "Well, we shall see how far that goes with me, Paul. You do not think that *I* would share such sordid sentiments?" She bent over him, and her lips tightened. "When you are ready I shall marry you, Paul."

He looked at her quickly—then holding her hands he bent forward and kissed her.

* * * * *

Events followed one upon the other. Will Tarrant was buried, Paul Noble left Hubbold. Peggy's duty was with the Tarrants, and with them she remained. The household was indeed a stricken one. Mr. Tarrant had grown twenty years older in appearance—his hair was quite gray. Mrs. Tarrant spent half her day in bed; and Lucile went about white-faced and hollow-eyed, with a mournful expression that had never before been present on her beautiful, proud face. She loved her father too dearly

to think of broaching the subject of the absent Noble while Will's death was so fresh a wound—nevertheless, his absence hurt her. She would not talk of him to Peggy, she could not talk of him to Mr. Tarrant, so that she had no one to confide in. Mr. Tarrant was too wrapped up in his sorrow and in worriment over his wife's state of health to pay any particular attention to Lucile. His comfort in those days was Charlie Stanton's daily presence at the Mills, and it was Charlie who, in the end, brought Lucile to her father's consideration:

"Ted Saunders was to see me last night," he said, casually. "He met Peggy and Lucile one day last week—you don't suppose now, Uncle Tarrant, that there's any hope for Teddy?"

"With Lucile?" Mr. Tarrant shook his head. "No, Charlie—I don't. Why? Has he said—"

"Nothing, uncle—excepting that he seemed quite downhearted over her appearance. She's not sick, is she?"

"Why, no," said Mr. Tarrant, hesitatingly. "Will's death—"

"Of course—I told Ted Saunders that. He said she ought to get away from the place for a while—you know how splendidly well she looked when she came back from Lakewood. Let her go again. And it won't be as if it were a strange place— She's acquainted there."

"Why, certainly, Charlie, if she wants to," said Mr. Tarrant. "I wouldn't think twice about it—but, to tell the truth, my boy, I wasn't dreaming of Lucile. Your Aunt Mary's mind is in a frightful condition—I can't imagine what ails the woman.

If we could send her away, too, with some good nurse—that Miss Day you had. But no—the very suggestion fairly seems to kill her. I'm afraid she'd die in a week if I sent her off against her will. Charlie, when do you think the old quiet times will come back? I have never known a happy hour since I quit The Laurels and went to live with Hannah. There must be a curse on Hannah's money." He spoke with wistful eyes fastened on his nephew's face. "It is because the money doesn't belong to us—let us distribute it fairly, boy—"

"Uncle Tarrant, I have all I need—there is no sense in having too much," said Charlie. "And Leila is busily occupied now, whereas if we had wealth, she might have time to brood over past troubles. If I need it I will ask you for it—that I promise. For the present let matters rest the way they are."

And although not satisfied with this, Mr. Tarrant had to let the thing drop. At dinner that night he spoke to Lucile. They were alone—Peggy having gone to Charlie's late in the afternoon, arranging to remain there for the evening.

"Would you care to go back to Lakewood for a while, Lucile?" he asked, very gently.

"I don't know," she responded in a listless tone. "Why?"

"Because I think you would feel better, dear, if you left Hubbold."

Lucile looked at him gravely.

"I left Hubbold once before," she said.

"Yes," he answered. "Yes—you did."

"Father!" with a quick change of tone. "Why did you send him away?"

"Child, I had to—I could not consent to your marriage with him—he is not worthy of you."

"And money has that much weight with my father?"

"Money? What is that? Nothing. Money has nothing to do with it. Lucile, dear girl, if he loves you rightly he'll come back again."

She looked at him, a peculiar smile wreathing her lips.

"He will come back again," she said.

A pang went through David Tarrant's sorely tried heart—if he but dared to show her the lawyers' letter! But he had given his word, and Paul Noble had claimed that word before he left. With kindly intent, and moved to friendliness by the young man's thought for them all when death overshadowed the house, Mr. Tarrant had advised him to throw himself on Lucile's leniency—to tell her all himself, and trust to her to wait for him until he proved his worthiness.

But this Paul Noble would not listen to, and after giving his word that he would not try to see Lucile until her father approved of it, he went away. Now David Tarrant believed that Lucile was embittered because of this, and her words intensified the belief. It was more than he could bear. He sank into a chair, a groan passing his lips, and Lucile forgot all her feeling of resentment then. She sprang toward him and put her arms about him.

"Father, dear, dear father—do not feel so badly. I have no right to worry you when you are so harassed—forgive me—"

He clasped her to him quickly.

"Lucile, have I ever denied you anything I thought you wanted? I would not deny you this man's affection if I thought—"

"But, father," she spoke quickly, "why did you send him away? There was room for him here—you could have tested him here, if you felt any test was necessary."

"Child, I could not. If you saw him every day, met him at every turn, you would win my consent in spite of my own good judgment. You may live to thank me. And now, Lucile, tell me, dear—do you care to go to Lakewood?"

"Yes," she said, suddenly, "if I may go alone."

"Just as you please," he answered. "And to stay as long as you like."

He felt her tremble in his arms. Then she turned her face to his and kissed him.

"You know that I love Paul Noble, father?"

"Yes, dear."

"Do you think, in time, I could forget him? That he would be nothing to me?"

"I think, Lucile, that you can do whatever you make up your mind to do."

"My mind! But my heart, father?"

He did not answer.

"I shall never forget him," she said, gently. "That is all. She kissed him once more, with great tenderness. "Thank you —for being so good to me."

CHAPTER X.

PEGGY MAKES A DISCOVERY.

AND now began a lonely time for the Lady Peggy—and a trying time. For some unaccountable reason Mrs. Tarrant had taken the greatest dislike to Lucile, and, probably for the same unaccountable reason, from the morning that Lucile entered her room to kiss her good-by before she went away, as in duty bound, she seemed to recover more of her old-time state of health. She began to make demands on Peggy's time and services—slightly enough at first, but the little maid, delighted beyond measure to be of use, submitted willingly. It seemed, after a while, that Mrs. Tarrant could not bear to have her out of her sight—nor did Peggy begrudge one moment that she gave to her.

Being so busily occupied the girl did not feel the weeks slipping away. An occasional visit to Charlie's—whither Teddy Saunders always managed to accompany her—was her only diversion; very rarely Leila came to the Hall, but her pretty face and gentle manners had little effect on Mrs. Tarrant. She took no notice of her, although glad enough to see Charlie.

Lucile had been gone almost three months. The letters she sent home were brief, but short as they were Peggy never failed

to read them aloud to the mother. She said nothing. She listened, but one could scarcely tell if she heard, and when Peggy answered them, she added the mother's love and affectionate remembrances with the feeling that her Aunt Mary cared nothing. Such a state of things was unnatural, and more than once Peggy marveled at it, and asked herself what could possibly lie under this apathy—bordering on actual dislike—toward her only living child.

In another matter Peggy was religiously faithful—she took care of Aunt Hannah's room as if the old lady had just left it and would return at any moment. Everything was as Aunt Hannah had had it during her lifetime, immaculately clean and spotless, for Peggy had always " righted " the room for her aunt from the time she had been grown up enough to understand what " righting " meant in poor Aunt Hannah's parlance. She was the only one who entered it, she knew, and after a while it became a duty with her to throw the windows open every week, and put fresh flowers in the tall vase on Aunt Hannah's polished table.

This morning she had a big bunch of hothouse roses in her hand, and, with a girl's natural love of the beautiful, was holding them up so that they covered her face. She had left Aunt Hannah's door ajar when she went downstairs to get them—now she saw with surprise that some one had thrown it wide open. Peggy might have been alarmed had not the glorious sunlight been streaming clear into the room, out into the hall. In its light the girl saw her Aunt Mary.

She stopped short.

"Why, I did not know you ever came here," she said, smiling. "If you'll wait for me—I just want to put these flowers in the vase, and then I'll run into your room to finish that story for you. We had to put it down at the interesting part yesterday—"

She would not notice the queer expression on her Aunt Mary's face, nor the trembling of her hands, nor the flush in her cheeks. She thought it unwise of the older woman to come here, but Peggy was not the girl to tell her so.

"Hurry, Peggy, then," she said—and Peggy heard her walk rapidly along the hall. Then came the bang of a door. Shaking her head, the girl went inside, humming the air of a song under her breath, and arranged the flowers.

Then she looked about her.

"Poor Aunt Hannah!" she said, a little wistfully. "She could come right in now—and never know she had been away at all. Poor Aunt Hannah! I wonder what will happen to this room—when no one cares any more?"

A sad little smile parted her lips. She moved about, putting finishing touches here and there. When she reached the dresser she was surprised at its disarray.

"I wonder if Aunt Mary touched these things?" she said. "That's queer—what was she doing?" She straightened the bottles and cushions. There was an old-fashioned cedarwood box that had been dearly treasured by the dead occupant of the room.

As Peggy put it into place again she noticed that a slip of paper protruded from under the cover. Involuntarily the girl drew it out, unfolding it. Then, seeing that it was closely written, she brought it over to the light. She recognized her Aunt Mary's angular penmanship at once—and the scrawl at the bottom—

Aunt Hannah's name in Aunt Hannah's own writing!

Peggy felt a deathly faintness stealing over her. She dropped into a chair, holding tightly to the edge of the window-sill. All grew dark before her eyes, so that for the moment she had no recollection of her surroundings. First the date—the very day of the month on which Aunt Hannah died—and after that—

"I bequeath unreservedly to my beloved niece and nephew, Charles and Margaret Stanton, the whole of my personal property, including the Hubbold Mills. To my brother David, $10,000; to his wife Mary, $5,000; to Lucile Tarrant, $5,000; to William Tarrant, $5,000; the legacies to my servants to remain as in the will to which this is an amendment.

"HANNAH TARRANT HUBBOLD."

Peggy picked up the slip of paper and read it over and over again—she could not believe her eyes—she could not think—not even though she pressed her hands to her head and tried to penetrate the mystery. A noise at the door attracted her. Looking toward it, she could have sworn that some one had pushed it farther open, that she heard the rustle of skirts once more along the hall. Peggy jumped to her feet, lifted the lid of the cedar-wood box and threw the slip of paper into it.

Then she fled incontinently—nor paused until she reached

her own room, and stood panting inside. Her face was very pale, her heart beating with sickening throbs.

What did it mean?

It was in Aunt Mary's handwriting, and Aunt Hannah had signed it . . . what did it mean?

Slowly the conviction forced itself upon her—the conviction that this was the latest expression of Aunt Hannah's wishes—

But how had it come to be in Aunt Mary's writing? A sudden chill made Peggy's teeth chatter. Aunt Mary had hidden that bit of paper—had known of its existence and hidden it. Why?

All knew the contents of the will that the mistress of Hubbold had had drawn up when Charlie Stanton angered her by his marriage to a Catholic. Aunt Hannah had made no secret of that will. But here was evidence that on her death-bed she had changed her mind.

The clouds seemed growing thicker and thicker. How had the paper found its way into the cedarwood box? The articles on the dressing-table had been disarranged, the box moved—had Aunt Mary placed it there intentionally? Had she meant Peggy to see it?

Peggy could not answer this—it seemed so improbable that Mrs. Tarrant could have concealed the paper and then deliberately put it in her way. She half-rose to her feet—she would go to her aunt and ask her to explain.

With her hand upon the knob she paused. She had forgotten Uncle David. Was she to bring another misfortune upon his

head? Not loss of money—Uncle David cared little for that; but loss of faith in the woman who had been his wife thirty years? Strange that Peggy, so young and child-like, should stand there and ponder on that crowning blow to the good old man. He had borne sorrow unflinchingly—but disgrace? How would he bear the disgrace of learning this?

Slowly Peggy's hand dropped from the knob; slowly she turned back into the room. She did not know even now what to do, but she was resolved that Uncle David should not suffer this through her.

But was it fair to Charlie? Once again that feeling of irresoluteness possessed the girl. With this new knowledge came the knowledge also that her beloved brother was being kept out of his rightful due.

"Charlie would agree with me," she argued, half aloud. "I know he would. Uncle David must—"

A tapping at the door disturbed her. She turned in her chair impatiently.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"Mrs. Tarrant wants you, Miss Peggy," said one of the maids.

But Peggy did not respond to the call. Peggy was arguing with herself, settling a question to her own satisfaction. There was a strange look in her eyes as she rose at last, and went out to obey her aunt's summons. Mrs. Tarrant was lying on the couch—she did not move when Peggy entered; the girl, without

hesitation, crossed the room and looked down at her. Strange as was the expression in Peggy's eyes, there was one here to match it. Question, doubt, relief—even a little regret.

"Are you coming to finish the story for me now?" she asked, quite naturally.

"Yes," said Peggy. "But I've got one to tell you."

There was something like grim Aunt Hannah in the girl's demeanor—a likeness to her in the resolute curves of this young face.

"The story I have to tell I found in the cedarwood box on Aunt Hannah's dressing-case," said Peggy, slowly. "It is there yet. I have put it back again."

"Yes?" asked Mrs. Tarrant.

"Yes. I'm going to forget that story."

Mrs. Tarrant stared at her as if she could not believe her ears. Then a mirthless smile curved her thin mouth.

"There must be insanity in your family," she said.

"But not dishonesty," said Peggy, steadily.

Mrs. Tarrant winced.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing excepting that which you know I mean. Get that slip from the cedarwood box—do as you please with it—but do not leave it where curious people may find it. That's all."

"Would you mind," her cold voice reached Peggy at the door, "would you mind answering one question before you go?"

Peggy turned. "I will answer as many as you like."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I mean," said Peggy. "That I know Aunt Hannah left that as a codicil to her will. I know that you wrote it—it is in your handwriting, and that Aunt Hannah signed it. I know that if Uncle David were to get that now, the disgrace of it would kill him. Oh, to think that the wife he so honors and respects could be guilty of such a deed! Spare your husband this discovery, Aunt Mary. He shall never hear it from me."

The older woman fairly cowered.

"Peggy!" she said, "come back—don't go; come back here. In the name of Heaven, what do you mean? That you will not make a move to claim your property? Hubbold and the Mills are yours and Charlie's—do you understand?"

"Yes," said Peggy. "Charlie and I are one. We love Uncle David, and are grateful to him for what he has done and offered to do for us. But I don't think that any trouble he has ever known could make him so unhappy as the knowledge of this, Aunt Mary. He wouldn't mind the money—I know Uncle David. Oh, Aunt Mary, how could you—how could you!"

She began to sob then. Mary Tarrant looked at her with fascinated eyes. She got up, came over to her, stood beside her.

"Don't cry, Peggy," she said. "Hush, and listen to me. I want to understand you clearly. You mean that you will not take what Aunt Hannah left you?"

"I mean just that," said Peggy, "just that. And now let me go, Aunt Mary—I don't want to talk of it any more."

CHAPTER XI.

LUCILE COMES HOME.

THE following Thursday, Lucile, without any warning, returned to the Hall.

They were quite unprepared for this; nevertheless, Mr. Tarrant beamed with delight when he saw her. Truly, if Lakewood had improved her before, this time she came back in perfect health, happy, smiling, more beautiful than she had ever been in her life. Everything was new to her; she entered into the scenes about her with her old-time gaiety; teased Peggy and Teddy Saunders; even invaded her mother's room and held converse with her, describing Lakewood and its charms to a woman who certainly was not responsive.

"Who would ever believe that Lucile could get over her melancholy so quickly!" exclaimed Charlie Stanton. "Why, she's as happy as a lark."

"Yes," said Leila.

"I imagined she really loved Noble there for a time—you remember how sober you and Peggy were about it!" Charlie laughed. "Take away sentiment from a woman's life, and she wouldn't think it worth living."

"That is true," said Leila.

"But this time what does your sentiment amount to? Teddy and I advise change of scene, Lucile goes away, presumably broken-hearted over a man whom her father forbids her to marry. Back she comes, well, handsomer than Lucile herself. Now, who was the wiser?"

"Charlie, dear," said Leila, serenely. "It is surprising to me, considering the length of time you have spent in my society, that you are not more clever."

"Thank you, dear. I shall live in hopes. But about Lucile—"

Sudden gravity quenched the smile in her eyes. She put her hand on his arm.

"Wait," she said. "Just wait. There's something unnatural about Lucile. She is not the girl who left us three months ago—that's all. I do not know where the change is: I can not tell yet. But it is there. Poor Uncle Tarrant!"

"Don't talk like that, Leila," said Charlie, almost crossly. "I grow angry when I think of all he has had to bear. I do hope Lucile—"

But he went no further; he did not know what he would say then, and Leila, who could have said it for him, would not. Instead, she stood on tiptoe and kissed him in her loving way and changed the conversation.

Meantime David Tarrant was enjoying the first week of happiness he had known in a long time. Lucile followed him about

everywhere—she was always ready at his call, she anticipated his wishes. Mrs. Tarrant's manner, too, had changed. It had become less indifferent. She seemed yielding for the first time in her life, and gentle—which the old man recognized with keen pleasure. Perhaps he had this perfect week to prepare him for what came at its close. Afterward he thought of it wonderingly, looking upon it in the light of a dream.

The shock came as suddenly as Will's death had come. Lucile was playing and singing—for a great wonder Mrs. Tarrant had come down into the music-room, and now sat beside her husband, listening, while Peggy, as of old, turned the leaves. The sound of voices outside the door did not disturb them, but Peggy looked up expectantly. Charlie and Leila were to have come a half-hour earlier. Instead of her brother, however, Paul Noble was standing on the threshold.

The girl's exclamation drew the attention of every one in the room. Mr. Tarrant half rose, suddenly cold and stern. Mrs. Tarrant, after her first glance at him, seemed to shrink into nothingness. Perhaps he could exercise some power of magnetism that frightened this woman. Lucile, flushing and paling, stood on her feet and without hesitation advanced to his side. There was something in her attitude even then that struck a chill to her father's heart.

"I did not think you were coming until to-morrow," she said.

"I could not stay away," he answered. He drew her hand

within his arm, and bent his handsome eyes to meet David Tarrant's questioning gaze.

"Sir," he said, "I hope you will be lenient toward two people who felt they could not live without each other. Lucile has been my wife two months and a half."

There was not a sound in the room. David Tarrant's face went ashen gray. Peggy was silent, helpless. And again Paul Noble spoke.

"Will you bid me welcome?" he asked, in his musical tones. "Or would you rather—"

"The door by which you entered leads out again," said Mr. Tarrant, in a harsh voice. "Go."

Paul Noble bowed.

"Come, Lucile," he said.

"Lucile, if you go with him, you stay with him, remember," said Mr. Tarrant. "You have wilfully deceived and disappointed me. That man gave me his word of honor that he would not seek you until he had my permission to do so. He has no word of honor. Can you trust yourself to him?"

"She is my wife," said Noble, proudly, "and as my wife her way is with me."

"Go, then," said David Tarrant, waving his hand. "I will have nothing to do with such a man as you. No, no," as Lucile came near, and would have spoken. "Go with your husband, Lucile—you have chosen him. Go with him, stay with him. When he has proven his true nature and you are willing to

acknowledge it, come back. But come back alone. Only then will I receive you."

Noble touched her.

"Come," he said, and this time there was a command in his voice—a command that made Peggy start and stare at Lucile apprehensively. The Lucile she had known would have resented such peremptoriness. But not this Lucile. Without a word from any one in the room, she followed her husband.

Nothing could fathom the silence that fell upon that group after the girl had left. Mrs. Tarrant crouched lower in her chair. Mr. Tarrant sat back in his, his face still that sickly, deathly hue. Peggy's hands were loosely folded in her lap.

Suddenly the crouching figure in the chair slid to the floor and Mrs. Tarrant knelt before her husband, looking up into his face.

"David!" she said. "David!"

"Wife!" he answered. "We are indeed alone!"

She put her arms about him.

"David!" she said. "Let us get away from here, where all is misery and unhappiness—let us go back to The Laurels, where we had peace, before Hannah came with her money to tempt us. Nothing has happened but calamity since. Let us give this up and go away—let us give it up and go away. Will you, David?"

"How can we?" he asked, groaning. "What is there left for us?"

"Oh, listen!" she said. "Hubbold is not ours—the Mills are not ours—nothing is ours. Hannah changed her will upon

her death-bed—and left everything to Peggy and Charlie. Let us get away from here, David—there is a curse on the place for us."

He thought she was raving, and with gentle hands drew her to him, patting her thin cheek tenderly. And now Peggy came forward.

"Uncle David," she said, "you know how sick Aunt Mary has been since Aunt Hannah died?"

"Yes," said Mr. Tarrant.

"Well, it is true what she says about the will—Aunt Hannah *did* change it—and Aunt Mary has been worrying about it ever since. Perhaps it was mislaid in the excitement. I found it the other day in Aunt Hannah's cedarwood box. I did, indeed, Uncle David. Didn't I, Aunt Mary?"

There was a low murmur from the woman—an indistinguishable murmur. Then she roused to life once more.

"David!" she said. "Forgive me—I could not help it—I did not mean—"

Peggy shook her head and laid her fingers on her lips. Mr. Tarrant, although bewildered, took the hint.

"It is all right," he said, soothingly. "Don't worry about it any more, Mary. It is all right."

"And you forgive me?" She looked at him anxiously. "You are sure you forgive me, David?"

"Yes," he said, and then he sighed. "Come upstairs; you are tired out. You can't stand this sort of thing now. Come."

Mrs. Tarrant straightened up and looked at him—very quietly, very gravely.

"David, you think I do not know what I am saying—you must fully understand me. Hannah made me write a codicil to her will, leaving everything to Charlie and Peggy—do you hear me, David?"

"Yes," he said, and Peggy, with quivering lips drew back. Fain would she have shielded this gentle old man from this bitterest of all blows. But she could do no more.

"She wanted me to send for the lawyer. I wrote it out, and she signed it. She was dying then, David—she died fifteen minutes afterward. I kept that paper, knowing that it was the only thing that stood between us and the Hubbold wealth; I kept it, intending to destroy it. But I could not—my conscience would not allow me. Night after night I sat up reading it, and often I thought Hannah would come to me and threaten me—" she shuddered. "David, do not blame any one but me for all this misery—it is all my fault; Will's death, Lucile—"

She began to sob heavily. Her husband sat staring at her with puzzled eyes.

"I was afraid of Lucile—somehow the feeling came that if Lucile spoke to me she would know that there was something wrong. I kept her away from me—I dared not allow any intimacy for fear she would read the guilt upon my face. It was the same way with that man. He frightened me. And now what I have brought upon you—all this misfortune, and through my sin."

Peggy could not endure the whiteness of the old man's face, the heart-break in his eyes. She went forward and put her arms about both of them, and by her clasp brought them closer together. The tears were in her soft blue eyes—she lifted those eyes to her uncle pleadingly.

"Dear Uncle David," she whispered. "Dear Uncle David!" Words of intercession between these two would be out of place for her she felt. So she simply pleaded with her sweet lips and her sweeter eyes—they saying all she would have said. Roused by her touch, the desolate father leaned forward and clasped his wife to his breast.

"It is all over," he said, in broken tones. "It is all over now—and we will forget it." And then he spoke to Peggy.

"Go, dear child, and leave us to ourselves."

She rose instantly. No one could intrude upon this hour of understanding, this hour of forgiveness and repentance. She went to the door, turning then, and rubbing her lashes free of the tears that blurred her sight.

Her uncle sat with cheek resting on his wife's bowed head, his eyes half-closed, his lips drawn. Peggy went out quickly, afraid that she would lose command of herself. Her bosom was heaving.

"Dear Lord, give Uncle David grace to bear his trials," she said, in a voice thrilling with emotion. "If he but had the faith now, how he could trace God's finger in all this. Give him the faith, dear Lord—give Uncle David faith."

The great peace that filled her at that moment seemed almost like an answer to her prayer. She hesitated.

"Perhaps," she said, a little wonderingly, "I have not prayed —perhaps I have not done my share! From now on," she brought her hands together, "from now on, every breath I draw shall be a prayer for Uncle David—that he may find and feel the consolation that is mine."

CHAPTER XII.

REALIZATION.

It was not without a pang that Lucile Noble followed her husband at his bidding and left the shelter of her father's roof. And although no one could be kinder or more gentle than Paul was then, she felt the most poignant sorrow. She did not regret her action—she had had, so far, no cause to regret it. It was only natural that the newness of this love, still untried, still unproven, had her in its thrall. There had not been time to question her own sense of right and justice: she had had ten weeks of unmixed pleasure, of affectionate intercourse with the man to whom she had given herself.

And now she had deserted her home for him—henceforth she had to depend upon him alone.

Part of the greatness of this sacrifice forced itself upon her—a dread of the unknown, a question; a troubling of the waters underneath the placidity of the stream of satisfaction. She looked at her husband with some of this dread, some of this question, some of this trouble in her face, as she sat beside him in the carriage that was taking them to the station. In anticipation of this event she had kept herself ready; her trunks, with all her per-

sonal belongings, were still packed, and in the small handbag she carried were most of the jewels given her by her father since her aunt's death—valuable enough, for Lucile was fond of such things, and David Tarrant had thought nothing worthy of her.

Casting her fate with the man she called her husband, she looked into his eyes. He did not answer that look in the way she most desired. Instead he laughed.

"Cheer up, darling. Next week will see you back again, welcomed with open arms! Do not fret."

"I am not fretting," said Lucile, quietly. "Not even if he never sends for us. I would not dare to fret."

"But laugh," he cried. "Why be so serious about it?"

"It is very serious to me," she answered. "I have given up my father—my people for you. Every one, everything. You are all to me—must be all. Isn't that enough to make me serious?"

"Forgive me, Lucile," he said, "if I do not agree with you. I know it is the accepted way of looking at things—especially do women love to prate in just that manner. But I'm sure I wouldn't object to your spending as much time as you pleased with your parents—providing," he added hastily, seeing her quick change of expression, "that I, too, am not deprived of your presence. I am not jealous, dear, not the slightest bit—and I certainly would not want you to forget those who had cared for you all your life—to whom you are bound by ties of natural affection."

He had wilfully missed the point then! Lucile, conscious of a

slight chill, sat back in the carriage and her face grew cold. Had he said these words deliberately, cast the welling up of sorrowful feeling back upon her own heart, that she might suffer it alone? Was it because he did not want to participate in what he must know was a grief to her? Must she hide her pain, and give him only of her joy?

So in the very beginning of her future—the future which she had welcomed with such greedy, overanxious hands, stood a question. There it stood: a painful question which would not be answered—which she could not answer—which she dared not answer, and which she had hoped, she realized now with a sickening sensation, to be able to answer at once—openly, unhesitatingly. There was the question. It was the question of all her future life. In how far could she trust this man who was her husband? At what point would he fail her? At what crisis would she have to stand alone?

She had not Peggy's undoubting faith—she had no higher Power on which to call, for religion to Lucile had been and was a mere name. She had no prop under her yearning hands that seemed to crave now something to lean on, something sure and stable.

With this sense of loss, this yearning, and this question, Lucile leaned back and stared moodily out of the carriage window. They were drawing close to the station and the man had slowed up, when a face she knew stirred her to sudden life. Before Noble could divine her intention she told the man to stop,

and then leaning out as far as she could, called, in a voice that shook in spite of all her efforts:

"Teddy! Ted Saunders!"

He heard instantly, and turned, and came back again, and with a sudden trembling of her lips she gave him both her hands —which were cold as ice.

"Teddy!" she whispered. "I came without saying good-by. Dear Teddy, tell them all that I loved them—that I dared not wait, or my heart would have broken. Tell Peggy to be good to father—and to mother, too—"

"Lucile, what is it?" he stammered. "What is the matter? What has happened?"

"This is my husband—Paul, you know Teddy?"

Paul Noble bent forward, a courteous smile on his handsome face. He put his arm about his wife and extended his right hand to Ted—honest Ted, who stood there in much astonishment.

"Your husband, Lucile!" he said. "Your husband!"

"I am indeed that lucky being," said Noble. Ted was shaking hands mechanically. "Lucile is upset, of course, at the suddenness with which all this has happened. You are surely happy, my dearest?" He looked at her as he spoke, and she shrank a little.

"Of course I am happy," she said, briefly. "But Teddy understands that it is somewhat of a strain to leave them all. You will tell them that, Teddy? And that Paul and I love each other dearly, and that we shall be glad when they can forgive us, so that

they may see how happy we are. Good-by, Teddy, dear old friend, good-by."

The carriage went on. Barely had she passed from Teddy's sight when Lucile, with sobbing breath, threw herself against her husband, weeping bitterly.

"Oh, Paul, Paul! Only love me, dear, only love me—and I will not care for anything—I do not care what happens if you will only love me."

* * * * *

"Paul," said Lucile, some two months later, looking up from the book she had been reading. "Paul, dear, I should like to talk to you."

"That's strange!" he answered. "Quite strange, Lucile. I am prepared to listen."

"The subject may not please you."

He looked at her searchingly a moment, then lounged back in the chair.

"If it doesn't, my dear, I shall tell you so."

"I am tired of hotel life," she said. "Tired of doing nothing. Isn't it time to think of getting our own home together?" She rose and, coming over to him, sat down close to him. "Paul, I am just hungering for a home of our own, no matter how little or insignificant it may be in the beginning. Can't we get it, dear?"

He gave her another sharp glance.

"Lucile, the home I could give you would seem very miserable after the home you have left."

"To you, it might. It will be heaven to me. Where we can be alone—do things for ourselves. This life is horrible."

"But what is the use when we are so unsettled?"

"Unsettled? In what way?"

"Your father may write you to come back—ask us to come back at any hour. Even now the letter is on the road, perhaps. What good will it be to change for so short a while?"

"Would you go back if he asked you to?" There was a note of scorn in her voice. "Is that what pride is in you? Remember, he despises you. Will he care more for you—now?"

He winced under that question.

"I wish you wouldn't bother me, Lucile—I am perfectly content. Why can't you be?"

"Content! Oh, of course!" She got up from the sofa. "Paul, I dread the effects of this life upon you. It is ruining you."

"Indeed, my dear, I think it will ruin others before it does me."

"But those cards—those long games in the card-room: you never reach your room before one or two o'clock—this morning it was half-past three! Paul, I can't stand it any longer. We must get away from here before the thing grows on you. How frightful if you began to gamble! I have read stories of such things—and I never appreciated the horror of them until

now. I realized it this morning, and I have worried myself sick. Paul, it is not right to bring this fear to me—you must come away when I ask you—"

She was shaking violently. He put up his hand and drew her down again to the sofa.

"Listen to me, Lucile," he said, not ungently, "you might as well understand the truth first as last. How long do you think the hundred dollars that you brought away from home with you lasted us?"

She did not answer—she did not know what the question meant.

"Exactly two weeks. Since then the money I have won at cards has supported you and me. So, girl, there is no use in talking in such a foolish manner. As for worrying—well, I don't worry, my dear—it's the other fellows do that. Cheer up. Until your husband has a streak of hard luck—at present things are booming—we'll live in clover. Get rid of that mournful aspect and we'll go to the theater to-night—just you and I. Yes, and to please you, I'll cut out the game for one evening. And that proves what an angel you have now for a husband, instead of a mere masculine nonentity."

He kissed her lightly, laughed down into her troubled face and then left the room, whistling the air of a popular melody. Lucile sat quite still until the echo of his footsteps along the hall died away. Then she threw herself face downward on the couch, frightful shudders going through her slender frame.

Yes; she was to taste the fruit that every one must taste who starts the journey of life depending upon a slender reed. Here was the reed that she had thought a mighty staff—and it pierced not her hand, but her very heart.

In those moments Lucile Noble went through the bitter fires of remorse, of sorrow, of disillusionment. She went through the crucible into which her own blind folly had cast her and looked upon her life as it was, as it would be.

"I will arise and go to my father!" From somewhere out of the recesses of memory that scriptural line returned, and although the hot blood of shame dyed her face, she straightened up, and considered it fairly.

"I will arise and go to my father"—for the sake of the man whom she had chosen before that father—for his sake, to save him from the sin he acknowledged so lightly. She would throw herself upon that father's kindness, and the tenderness that had never failed her. With this resolve strong upon her, she drew out paper and pen to write the letter that she had vowed in her pride and sense of injury never to send.

To read the struggle of her soul then would have been sorrowful for any one who could sympathize with a proud nature in the throes of rebellion. And yet she forced herself to the distasteful task, and after a while the love and longing for that dear, kind face crept into her words. Line after line covered the pages. She had not known what to say, but, once started, the words came easily enough. Brave words indeed were they, but

the ones who loved her could read the pathos and the unrest underneath.

And so she asked her father if she and her husband might come home to her people—that she could not settle down away from them; that she wanted them. Surely they had not forgotten her—surely they would welcome her. And all she asked was to be assured of their welcome, and the moments would crawl until she saw them again. She could not live happy apart from them.

So wrote Lucile Noble, who two months before had proudly told herself that she would risk her future willingly with the man she loved.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE DEPTHS.

THE answer to that letter came right speedily. Paul Noble himself took the envelope bearing the Hubbold postmark from the clerk, and with something like triumph in his eyes carried it to his wife's room. She had not told him she had written to her father, fearing that no answer would come—and he, in the recognition of the postmark, saw in this epistle the realization of all his hopes. David Tarrant had relented and would welcome them home with open arms!

"Eureka!" he said, gaily, waving the envelope in air as he came to her, seated with her book in hand. Reading was now her only solace, her only employment. "Eureka!" he said again. "Here we have news at last, Lucile. Return at once —the fatted calf is to be killed in our honor: in honor of son and daughter."

She winced a trifle as he laid the letter in her lap and then stood gazing down at her with that gay smile on his lips. She put her hand across it and looked at him.

"Paul," she said, with a quiver in her voice, "be serious

—just this once be serious. Listen to me. I did not want to tell you before—I was afraid father would not answer me, but—I wrote home four days ago."

He frowned a little. Then he shrugged his shoulders in a peculiar manner.

"Well—I'm sorry—they would have come around all right—I'm sorry."

He paced up and down the room rapidly a few times, and at last came back and stood over her.

"Yet you would have to do it in the end, so I suppose it doesn't matter. At any rate read the letter, and let us know the worst. I suppose he'll make a lot of stipulations—but we can get rid of those once we settle matters."

Lucile was wishing that she could have this letter to herself at first—but in another moment she chided herself for the wish. She was anxious to read her father's words, but her heart yearned over her husband, whom she saw courting the fate of all others who risk fortune, and finally name and honor, on the throw of a dice, the turn of a card. So, smiling bravely up into his face, she broke the seal, and as he stooped to read the words with her, she made room for him beside her. He put his arm about her, and the touch satisfied her sense of helplessness. She felt stronger, suddenly. She felt that she could trust him.

So did her heart conquer her judgment—conquer even her reason and her common sense.

His eyes glanced through the first lines very rapidly. Then

a muttered word fell from his lips and his face whitened. He said nothing else, but he read with her to the very end. The paper fluttered from her cold fingers to the floor, and neither of them spoke or moved. For Lucile the shock consisted—so well had she learned to read the man she had married—of her knowledge that this would be a bitter blow to him. For herself she cared nothing. The love and tenderness in that letter set her pulses beating; her father's words brought up her father's face, and she longed for him with all her aching heart. Nowhere else could she fly for the consolation of true affection; no one else on earth ever loved her as he had done.

So they sat there. It was Paul Noble broke the silence at last: the breath he drew a shuddering one.

"Well," he said, with a laugh, "we've caught it."

She did not answer. He got up on his feet and began to stride rapidly up and down the room again—but this time nervously energetic.

"Another will! Another will! And the two Stantons inherit Hubbold, money and all! The Mills! What a fortune in those Mills! By heaven, but this is a pretty kettle of fish! And that it should be the Stantons!"

His words were mild enough, but his expression plainly denoted that he did not know what he was saying. Lucile followed him with her eyes—and finally he became aware of that scrutiny. She knew, as he stood looking at her, that he was in a passion. She had not seen him violently angry before, but it

never came to her to be afraid of him—not even now when he looked down at her with that distorted face.

"I wish I had the Stantons here to tear them limb from limb," he said, between his shut teeth.

His wife stared at him in perplexity. Fortunately she did not try to reason with him. She said nothing—not a word. But the mask fell from his face then, and the image she had been trying to keep unbroken in her heart crumbled into dust. She looked at the wreck of her ideals, she looked at the wreck of her future. But she threw her head in air fearlessly.

"What do you mean," she asked.

The question gave him a chance to secure control of himself. He turned away.

"Do you mean to say that you—that you— That this—this misfortune—this news makes no difference to you?" He bit each word off savagely.

"A great deal of difference," she said, and then she smiled. "Paul, here is our chance, dear, here is our chance. You didn't marry me for Aunt Hannah's money—you know you didn't. Aunt Hannah's money is gone—we can go back now without fear of having false motives ascribed to us. Let us go back." Her eyes filled with tears. "The legacy father mentions will get us a pretty place—and we can settle down, just you and I, in a home of our own—our very own. And the Mills are there—and there is room for you as well as father and Charlie. We'll be so happy—"

He laughed shortly. The laugh was worse than a blow to her.

"If that is your idea of happiness, it isn't mine," he said. "We'll not go back."

She grew very pale.

"We'll—not—go—back. Realize that now once for all. A nice figure I'd cut with that little idiot Peggy—" He choked. "Do just as you like—go if you like—but you'll go as your father said you should—alone."

He went out and slammed the door behind him. Lucile gathered up her father's letter, bringing it to her lips.

"He will think better of it," she said, under her breath. "He must think better of it."

Not the slightest doubt troubled her. She read and reread her father's gentle words to her; read them with tear-filled eyes and a smile on her lips. It was so good to feel that dear, protecting love about her once again. Once again she had something to rely on—something to sustain her.

"We may go to-morrow," she said. "I shouldn't wonder if we did. I must write now. I'll write and tell father and Peggy that we are coming—that they must meet us—and that they must be nice to Paul."

In her excitement it took her only a few moments to carry out her resolve.

"I shall persuade Paul to start as soon as possible—perhaps to-morrow," she wrote. "He may not like it, he may have business affairs to settle," she winced a little over the deception,

"but, nevertheless, he must come. I am longing to see my dear father—and mother, too. And Peggy and Charlie and Leila, and dear old Ted. Don't answer this—I shall be with you almost as soon as it arrives."

She called the bellboy and sent the letter off at once—and then with softened face and the wistful smile still upon her lips sat reading over and over the missive that meant so much to her.

* * * * *

Evening came; the dinner-hour passed, and Paul Noble did not appear. Lucile dined alone—she would not go into the dining-room without him. When the hours went on without bringing him, a deep melancholy took possession of her. At half-past ten she felt that if she could but exchange a word with him it would satisfy her doubts, set her mind at rest. She called the boy once more.

"Go to the card-room and tell Mr. Noble to come to me just for a few moments—I will not detain him," she said.

The boy went, returning with the message that Mr. Noble was not in the card-room; he had looked in the other rooms, too, but he was not there.

At midnight Lucile retired. She lay awake until morning. Her husband did not return. Day broke; she rose in a panic of fear. What could have happened to him? He must have been injured—

But no. Had that been the case she would have received word.

There were enough papers and cards upon his person to identify him.

The day went by. The melancholy, the sorrow, the fear gave way to apathy at last—dullness. Here it was the morning—the afternoon—the night of the very day on which she had told her father they would start on their journey home. Once more she sat at her solitary meal in her solitary room. But every mouthful seemed to choke her, and she pushed away the food untasted. Leaning her elbows on the table, she propped her head upon her hands, and while she sat in this manner, a heavy figure lurched against the door. Her husband stumbled in. She sprang to her feet in alarm, her bosom heaving.

It did not need a second glance to tell her that he was intoxicated. Nor even mildly so, but in a sodden, sickening state. Lucile looked at him with horror in her glance, fright, shame, misery unspeakable. And then, with a woman's intuitive desire to shield from public knowledge the disgrace or vice of the man she loves, Lucile crossed the room quickly and shut the door behind him.

One thing, fortunately, was spared to her. Disgusting as was his condition, the white face, the horrified eyes she turned on him, seemed to penetrate even his dulled brain. He mumbled and swore and mumbled again, but he did not speak to her, nor she to him. Seeing the food upon the table, he went over and seated himself, eating ravenously, his hands waving in the air as he brought each bit to his mouth. Lucile simply stood and

watched him—watched his every movement. Then, when his head fell forward on his breast, and he slept, she went softly into the inner room.

"No," she said. "No—we shall not go back. Dear, dear father—my father—oh, my father! Good-by," she whispered. "Just good-by."

* * * * *

It was some days before Paul Noble recovered sufficiently to speak sensibly on any subject. He was ashamed of himself—but not too much so. He felt that he owed himself occasional indulgence—he had not touched liquor in almost six months—too much to expect of any man. So he was not prepared to make any excuses whatever, and Lucile did not look for any.

"Have you answered your father's letter yet?" he asked her, finally.

"Yes," she said.

"And what did you say to him?"

She was standing at the window, staring down into the busy street.

"Just what you bade me," she said. "That we would not return."

He was taken aback at the coldness of her manner, the decision of her voice.

"I wrote at once that we were going, that we would start the next day. During your—illness," she paused on the word, and he had the grace to wince, "I wrote again. I told him that your

business affairs were in a pretty bad condition—that you could not leave them; that if he cared to, he might send me the amount Aunt Hannah left me—it would help us to tide over a crisis and probably set you on your feet again. I left him to surmise the business—real estate, I indicated."

Paul Noble looked at her.

"What do you mean—what do you intend doing?"

She turned.

"I am your wife," she said, and the expression in her voice was hard to understand. He could not understand it.

"I know that."

"I shall act a wife's part. In that bag are the jewels I brought with me from home—I have no use now for jewelry. When the few thousands come—as come they will, for I know my father, you can have them, you can do as you please with them. My place is with you, and with you I have to stay. I had thought it a pleasure—but now it is my duty. I will not shirk my duty, Paul."

All the manliness left in his miserable soul rose up to meet the break in that voice. He crossed the room with a few quick steps, and clasped her in his arms. She did not resist him, neither did she yield. He turned her impassive face to him and looked at her.

"Lucile! Don't talk like that! Do you want to madden me?"

"I am past the maddened stage," she said, slowly. "Past

and below it. I am in the depths of misery and despair. Have you thought of *me?*"

"Forgive me, Lucile, forgive me! You don't understand a man's temptation. Put up with me, and I'll try to do better—I swear I will, Lucile. Look at me, look, smile— Ah, Lucile, don't you know that you are enough to drive a man crazy with your cold face—"

But the pleading in his voice, really genuine, broke down the barriers. She loved him. It was no longer the love of other days when she had been proud of him; but still she loved him. She clasped her arms about his neck and wept. Not with the tears that are dried easily, because the sorrow is a fleeting one; rather with the hopeless, heavy weeping of a woman who has cast her lot with pain and sorrow and is taking up the weary way of life with them alone.

She had no faith, none of the tender religious fervor that we Catholics know—therefore was she indeed desolate. She had courted her own disappointment, she had made a failure of her life and being more just than the majority—perhaps prouder—she abided by her mistake. For her repentance took the form of stoical endurance. She knew of God, she knew of religion. That was all. She did not call on either for the strong help that comes to man in the hour of his dire necessity.

It was alone. Then, as well as later, Lucile felt that she had made shipwreck of her hopes. Then, as later, she understood the lesson her father had tried to teach her. "So many of us

mistake blind folly for the divine passion," he had said, "that it is not safe to wait." So it had not been the divine passion in her case, but blind folly—and she, like every other erring mortal, had to pay the penalty. She had yielded to her own headstrong will, and it carried her whither it would. It had carried her to the brink of an abyss. Her future here and hereafter depended now upon how she took up her burden.

CHAPTER XIV.

PEGGY'S KNIGHT.

THINGS changed very little at Hubbold Hall during the next two years, save that Peggy Stanton had matured somewhat and had grown broader-minded in the loving life she led. Essentially a ministering soul, her newly acquired wealth gave her full power to exercise this trait of her disposition. "The little chapel at the end of the town," as Lucile had called it, was no longer the humble place of worship it had been, and the Hubbold Mills were held up as an example of what wealth can do for those it employs. The Stanton name was indeed an honored one.

And what of the other people of our tale?

Leila was the happy mother of a little girl whom they had called Margaret, after her Aunt Peggy; Charlie was the same genial, honest, God-fearing fellow of old, for it was not in Charlie's nature to change—he would be the same until the day he died. And Ted Saunders was Peggy's devoted swain, though as yet she had given him very little encouragement.

Mr. and Mrs. Tarrant were more to each other in these days than they had ever been. Mrs. Tarrant's temptation had broken her pride. She had been humiliated, and she never forgot it,

so that her humiliation meant the betterment of her whole life. They were comparatively happy. Time wears away the sharp edge of the keenest sorrow. Although their keenest sorrow was seldom mentioned between them, it was nevertheless present. They had not heard from Lucile again, beyond a brief note of thanks from her and her husband, conjointly written, on the receiving of the check for the sum that had been left to the girl by Aunt Hannah.

We take up the thread of their lives one sunny morning in June. Peggy, with gentle hands, is leading an old man out upon the porch. He obeys her guiding touch implicitly, and sinks into the chair she places for him.

"Leila said she would bring baby out here—we'll make her walk to you!" said Peggy, in her gentle voice. She is the same dear little Peggy, with the same soft light in her gentle eyes, and the same lingering sweetness of smile. "Do you smell the roses, the June roses, Uncle David?"

"Yes, dear—it's good I'm not losing my sense of smell as well as my sense of sight," he said, with a smile. "It will be something to remember, this—the smell of the June roses and little Meg toddling along on her unsteady, baby feet." He sighed wearily. "It is good to have a child in the house, Peggy dear—it keeps us young."

"Or makes the baby old," mused Peggy.

"Not while she has such a child for a mother as Leila is," declared Mr. Tarrant. "How does she manage to keep so happy?

Natures are differently constituted, little girl. Charlie and you and she are so content, so satisfied to take what comes—"

Peggy shut her lips resolutely, and looked out across the old-fashioned garden that her own hands had made to bloom at the foot of the southern porch for her Uncle David's special gratification. Then, with heightened color she turned to him, and his dimming eyes could not but see the beauty of the face she brought so close to his.

"We have the secret, Uncle Tarrant," she said. "We have learned the secret."

"I daresay," he said. "It's in that wonderful religion of yours."

"Yes," said Peggy. "That's the secret."

"I'll acknowledge it," said Mr. Tarrant. "But I can't see, Peggy."

"Perhaps that is why God is depriving you of sight," answered Peggy. "To make your soul see."

Wise Peggy! She said such things as these so simply, so unaffectedly, not knowing what effect they had upon their hearers. These words struck this man strangely now. A peculiar expression came across his face. But Peggy had said enough. She was sensitive in regard to pressing her faith upon any one.

"At least your sight is getting no worse," she said, gently. "It is just about the same as it was six months ago."

He waited a few moments. Then he put his hand on her head.

"Peggy, dear!" he whispered. "It *is* worse—much worse."

She did not answer him in words, but she patted his hand softly and then kissed it.

"My dear Uncle David!" she said.

"Would you believe, Peggy, that a prayer that I should make would be answered?" he went on, tremblingly.

"Why!" said Peggy. "What a thing to say! God will surely listen to your prayers, Uncle David! Oh, if He didn't there would be no hope for any of us."

"That's heretical," said Mr. Tarrant.

"It is not," said Peggy, indignantly. "Why, that would be an awful thing to say—that God wouldn't listen to *you*. Uncle David, I—"

"Well, that's all right, dear." Again he hesitated. "I am praying, Peggy—praying very hard. Do you know what for?"

She knew. The tears rushed to her eyes. She put her arms about him as she whispered the one word: "Lucile."

"Lucile," he answered. "Just Lucile. I am praying that God won't shut out the light altogether until I see Lucile once more. After that, I do not care."

"He won't," said Peggy, softly. "He's such a great, loving God, He just won't. I'll ask Him, too. And Leila and Charlie. We all will. Your prayer will be answered."

She spoke with such conviction that his face lighted up with hope. But before he could speak, a merry voice floated out to them.

"There's Grandfather Tarrant and Grandmother Peggy to-

gether again—look out, baby, or you'll fall. And your nose is enough like Peggy's now—I don't want any noses like that in my family."

"Leila!" cried Peggy. "And Meg—sure enough, it's Meg. Come on, baby—see here's grandfather waiting for you—catch her, Leila, catch her! Oh, I thought she was surely down that time."

Leila's laughing dark face appeared now, bent close above the tottering little figure in white, making its proud first walking expedition to the old arms held out to her. She reached him safely, with a chuckle of satisfaction, as he caught her and lifted her up on his knee.

"Ted's in the drawing-room," announced Leila, then. "Get thee away, fair maiden."

"Why didn't you bring him here?" asked Peggy, almost crossly.

"He wouldn't come. You see, I told him to-day was your birthday—"

"Leila!"

"So he has something to give you which no one else dare share. Go get it, Peggy, and come back and show it. It's about time you gave the parishioners of St. Francis de Sales something to talk about, or you'll have Father Daly reading the riot act on long company-keeping."

"Riot act! Company-keeping!" gasped Peggy. "Well, *what* a piece of impertinence!" Her head flew up in the air. "I wouldn't do anything so vulgar."

"Oh, call it what you like," said Leila, nonchalantly. "But that's the right name for it. So set the day, or I'll get Father Daly to publish the banns—"

"I really believe you would," said Peggy. What annoyance she felt at Leila's words disappeared when she saw the amused smile that lighted up her uncle's whole countenance. Leila always cheered him at once. The girl sped away to the drawing-room.

"I came in to bring you right out to see Uncle Tarrant," she said to the handsome young fellow who was standing at the mantel, and who turned when she entered. "What do you mean by not paying your respects to him first?"

"Because I wanted to pay them to you," he said, looking at her cheerful little face, "and to congratulate you. Allow me." He advanced to her side, and before she could divine his intention, had put his arm about her and kissed her.

"Well!" she exclaimed, when she could get her breath. She looked up at him—at the half-laugh in his eyes, at the gravity of his face. Her head went up in its own particular way—Peggy's way—and she would have left him immediately. But he held her tight.

"I have something else for you," he said. "Now you needn't be angry, Peggy—I won't mind it one bit. Here, see if this fits you?"

He pressed the spring of the small velvet box he held in his hand, and Peggy's eyes caught the sparkle of a diamond.

"This is your engagement ring," he said. "Put it on, Peggy, or allow me to."

But she locked both her arms behind her.

"No, Teddy, I won't."

"Yes, Peggy, you will."

"Why?"

"Because I say so."

"Because—you—say—so—"

Her mood changed; she caught her breath sharply, and drew away from him.

"Teddy, I want to ask you one single question—just one. Would you, if you knew I wanted something very much, try to get it for me?"

"It is not necessary to ask me the question, Peggy."

"Perhaps not—but I like to ask questions." She stood a moment, pondering. "Teddy, you've read about the knights of old, how chivalrous and daring they were. Those old tales of brave deeds always set my blood tingling, and I often wish I were a man that I could go out and do something strong, something great. Teddy, I'm not a man, I'm only a girl, and not very brave at that. But will you be my knight for me?"

"At your service." He bent on one knee, and lifted a half-amused and wholly earnest face to hers. "Give me the degree of knighthood, and I promise to serve you in every way that lies in a man's power."

She leaned forward and struck him lightly on the shoulder.

"Rise, Sir Knight!" she said. "Oh, Teddy, Teddy—if you can only do what I ask—"

"There *is* something, then?" he asked in surprise. "What is it, Peggy?"

"Ted, I've been speaking to Uncle David. He's growing blinder every day— Do you know what he said to me just a few moments ago?"

"No, Peggy."

"That he was praying for one favor from heaven—that he might keep his sight until Lucile came home. Think, Ted. In two long years we have not seen her, nor heard from her. Teddy, will you be my knight, and go out and find her for us? Will you, Ted?"

"I would do more—much more than that for you, Peggy," he answered, gravely. "I have never spoken of Lucile to you—I was afraid you might not want me to talk of her. I did like her very much—I like her still, Peggy. We had all grown up together—Charlie and you and she and I, and it seemed sort of natural that we should marry. But one thing I want you to rest assured of—that the love I offer you to-day is an entirely different affection to that which I offered Lucile. She was right in rejecting me—she realized, although I did not, that it was not all it should have been. You understand, Peggy?"

"Thoroughly," she answered, gravely. "Do not worry on that point. And now, Teddy—"

"Yes?"

"If you will find Lucile, dear, and bring her home—you may— Well, I'll see if the ring fits me, Teddy."

He looked at her a moment. Then, without a word, he swung on his heel and went toward the door. The sudden resolution that hardened his face made Peggy's heart leap. But on the threshold her voice halted him. Teddy was to be initiated into the witchery of a woman's inconsistency.

"Just a minute, Teddy," she said, softly. "Come back here one minute."

She met him half-way, holding out both hands toward him.

"It isn't fair to do that," she said. "I know you will do what I want you to. So you may—see—if it fits—now—Teddy."

CHAPTER XV.

TEDDY'S SEARCH.

TEDDY SAUNDERS went home, packed his grip, and left that night to search for Lucile.

He had very little to aid him in his search—her last letters, and the name of the place where she had lived two years before. He shook his head as he thought what slender clews these were in case Lucile had gone away from Binghamton. But if her husband was interested in real estate there, it did not seem likely that she would have gone very far from the scene of his operations. Teddy knew little about Paul Noble—and nothing of the cause that had made Mr. Tarrant so bitter against him. He felt some reluctance to touch on such a delicate subject, and Charlie, his friend, was singularly reticent where Lucile was concerned. So that Teddy was setting forth now on more of a wild goose chase than even he anticipated.

He reached the little city rather late in the evening and went to the hotel which happened to be nearest—the leading hotel, in fact. Here he registered. Afterward, when he was in his own room, he pulled out his wallet, to glance over Lucile's letters once more—Peggy had given them to him before he left that they might

be of what use possible. He recognized, with a start of surprise, that he was in the very hotel from which the letters had been dated. Acting on the impulse of the moment, he asked to see the manager of the house. That gentleman put in an appearance at once.

"Have you any recollection," asked Teddy, "of a Mr. and Mrs. Noble who resided here some two years ago?"

"A Mr. and Mrs. Noble?" He thought a while. "I can't say that I have—so many people stop here, of course. You have no idea how long they stayed?"

"Over two months, if not longer," hazarded Teddy. "That long at least. Mr. Noble was interested in real estate; he had an office somewhere in the place, I imagine."

The manager shook his head.

"Not in this place—there are only some half dozen firms interested in land hereabouts. Broderick is one of the leading ones; also Franklin. I'd advise Broderick, if you are thinking—"

"No, no; not at all," interposed Teddy, hastily. "I am merely trying to trace Noble. Perhaps he had dealings with some of the real estate firms without becoming very well known himself. I'll call on them all to-morrow, if you will kindly give me their addresses."

"With pleasure," answered the man, writing them down immediately.

"Not much information there for a fellow," said Teddy

"But it's a beginning anyhow. And the beginning is half the battle, they say. I'll go to sleep on it."

The following morning he visited all the real estate firms in Binghamton. No one of them had known or heard of Paul Noble. Broderick and Franklin, the two leading men, went over their books for him to discover if they had had even the slightest transactions with the man in question, without result. A little bit perplexed, Teddy returned home and sent for the manager again.

"I'm awfully sorry to trouble you," he said, apologetically. "But I guess you're about right on the real estate. Yet I know that the Nobles did stay here; if you'll ask your clerk to look over the list, you'll find out—"

"I'll have him do so at once, now," said the man. "We could have done that last night if I had thought you wanted to know anything but his interest in real estate. Noble, you say? The name sounds familiar—I have surely heard it. Well, we'll see."

"Yes—Paul Noble. His wife's name was Lucile, in case you ever heard her mentioned—"

"Supposing you come down to the clerk yourself and ask him? He's got a fine memory; perhaps he can hit it at once."

Teddy obeyed.

"I've come to find out if you can remember a Mr. and Mrs. Noble who lived here some two years ago," began Teddy. "Paul Noble—"

"The gambler?" asked the clerk. "Why, yes, I remember him distinctly. They have not been here in a good two years, though."

"The gambler?" repeated Teddy. "I think you're mistaken there. I heard he was in the real estate business."

"Not the Paul Noble who stopped here," said the clerk. "He lived on his wits, I believe. He had a very beautiful wife, if I recollect rightly, and he was quite a good-looking fellow; tall, dark, fine complexion, well-built."

"That is he, without a doubt," said Teddy. His heart sank.

"A gambler! Lived by his wits!" And the man was speaking of Lucile's husband. "I am interested in the wife," he said, "Her father is ill and wants her to return home. He has lost track of her. You could not think now of some way I could find out where they went when they left here?"

"Mr. Noble himself was a Western man—he told me he was going back to his home—somewhere in Colorado."

"Somewhere in Colorado," repeated Teddy. "Rather definite, isn't it? Well, I'll have to wait advices."

He wrote to Peggy then—just a few lines, telling her of his non-success, and asking her to find out all that she could about Paul Noble, his family, and his birthplace. Peggy did then what she should have done in the beginning—consulted her brother Charlie, with the result that Charlie was able to secure, without Mr. Tarrant's knowledge, the letter which had come from the Denver lawyers.

And, with this letter in his possession, Teddy started across the continent.

We will pass over the details of his journey and of his arrival in the city. A day's rest was necessary here, for Teddy Saunders detested traveling with a heartfelt detestation. Then he interviewed the firm of Black & Dalzell.

Yes; they knew of Paul Noble. He had been there the year before with his wife, to claim a share in the estate of an uncle who died intestate. He had settled with the other heirs, and, they believed, gone East again. He had spoken of going East. Mr. Black went through a file of letters thoughtfully and produced one. It bore on some trifling matters connected with the money which they had recently paid to Paul Noble, and was postmarked from New Haven, Connecticut.

Teddy Saunders looked grim when he read the letter.

"The fellow's fond of traveling," he said.

"Yes," said Mr. Black. "He was always the black sheep—never worth a moment's serious consideration. He'd turn up here to-day—and a month later he'd be as far at the other end of the globe as he could get."

"Cheerful news to a man who has to find him," said Teddy. "Well, I'll have to get to New Haven now—and I was not very far away from it when I started out here." He groaned. "Will you allow me to copy the address of his New Haven place—probably a hotel, as usual."

"Likely to be a boarding-house," said Mr. Black, cordially,

for Teddy's honest face and manner had impressed him. "I wish you more success there than you had here. But why don't you advertise for him? He might be in Denver without our firm knowing of it."

"Of course!" said Teddy. He laughed. "I'll do some of that at once. I wouldn't like to have to come back again."

So for the next two weeks Teddy stayed in the pleasant Western city, enjoying himself in a quiet way, but not getting a bit further in his search. At the end of that period he returned East.

He had success at once in locating the small boarding-house in which Paul Noble and his wife had lived when they came back from Denver. The owner of the house remembered Mrs. Noble particularly well.

"They lived here six months," she said. "Her little boy was born here—and it died here, too. I think that was what made her so anxious to get away. She couldn't bear the place after the little fellow went. 'Perhaps I had no right to call him David,' she would say to me, that sorrowfully. 'David seems to be a fated name in our family.'"

"Was she happy?" asked Teddy, involuntarily. Then, as the woman looked at him with searching eyes: "I am sent by her family to seek her and to bring her home if possible. Tell me, did she seem to be happy?"

"No," said the woman, slowly. "She was not happy—though she never opened her lips, but women have a way of finding out such things. Noble was a fine, pleasant-spoken man,

but he had not the right care for her—although I think he liked her. But I know she followed him to the door, begging of him to stay with her the night the child died, and he wouldn't. 'How are you going to bury it?' he asked, 'if I don't go out?' The little chap wasn't dead then, and the words cut her right to the heart. But she said nothing, and when I went up to sit with her, I wouldn't have known that she minded being alone if I hadn't heard him say the words. She was a brave woman, but so sad, so very sad, always."

Teddy turned away to hide the tears that sprang to his eyes. She was speaking of Lucile! Of Lucile, the cherished darling of her father's heart! Mrs. Lee's eyes were wet at the remembrance.

"I advised her to leave the man," went on the woman. "I asked her if she had any folks, and when she told me 'Yes' I almost begged of her to go straight home to them as soon as the baby was buried. That was the next day—Mr. Noble never came home all night, and I was furious at him. But she smiled in that way she had. 'One can't do that,' she said. 'I took him for better, for worse, and he's my husband, and with him I'll stay until he himself casts me off.'

"Of course I said nothing after that," she went on. "No one could, and two weeks later she left."

"To go where?" asked Teddy, impetuously.

"To New York City, I believe. She promised to write to me and to let me know how she got along, but you know how far

such promises carry. Though, dear knows, I would have been glad to hear from her. If you see her, will you remember to tell her, sir?"

"I will," said Teddy, his heart warming to this woman who had such a kindly word for the unfortunate girl. He knew now how unfortunate. And that Lucile should have had to suffer this loneliness and this humiliation! It seemed unbearable.

He adopted the methods in New Haven that he had in Denver—advertising in all the local papers. With the same result—nothing. Then he went to New York. The trail was a blind one now, and if he heard no news here, he had nothing further to work on; knew no other way to find the missing pair. In every newspaper in the city and its vicinity he inserted the same advertisements, and when nothing came he sat down and pondered.

He felt that now he was at the end—that if he wanted to discover any trace he must call in outside help. But who? A private detective? He frowned at the very thought. So his pondering came to a halt, and he gave up in despair.

He knew that he would have to return home—to Peggy, who trusted in his ability—he would have to return home with not a single thing to show for all these weeks away from her. Weeks! He had started out in June and it was now the end of August.

He sat with a newspaper spread out on his lap, his eyes carelessly scanning the headlines, for his thoughts were full of the one great subject. Suddenly a light broke over his face.

"Captain Fitch says that every gambling-house in his pre-

cinct is known to him, and that within the next forty-eight hours he will have them all closed up."

A common enough declaration in these days—but the words gave Teddy Saunders the light he needed. He looked at his watch—ten o'clock. He'd try to carry out the plan that had come to him. If every gambling-house was known to such men as Captain Fitch, why not the gamblers also? A half-hour later he was at Police Headquarters.

He stated briefly, succinctly, just what he wanted, and briefly, succinctly, they consulted a few records and told him where he would be apt to find Paul Noble.

"He's in the city, sure; one of the worst in the bunch," was the information he received.

"The trouble is I may not be able to recognize him," said Teddy. "Is there any of your men could help me? I only met him two or three times in my life, and I'm apt to pass him by on the street. I've been advertising for him for the last three weeks, but it hasn't been of any use."

A "plain clothes" man was detailed to accompany him that evening to the resorts where Paul Noble was possibly to be found. Nor did the light that had illuminated Teddy's mind that day fail him here. In the very first rooms they entered the detective pointed to a man lounging in an easy-chair near the door.

"There's Noble," he said. "I guess you won't need me any longer."

Teddy hesitated. He saw Paul Noble looking at him,

curiously. He had spoken truly when he said that he would not have recognized him. The pace at which this man was living was destroying the handsome outlines that had won Lucile Tarrant's heart. The eyes were blood-shot, the cheeks flabby, and the restless, nervous movements betrayed the dissipation that was undermining his constitution. Very slowly Teddy advanced and stood in front of him.

"If you are Paul Noble, may I speak to you outside?" he asked.

CHAPTER XVI.

FAILURE.

"WHAT do you want with me?"

He spoke the question surlily—flung it at him, in fact, and a hot retort rose to Teddy's lips. But he choked it back.

"Simply to ask you a few questions."

"Ask them here."

"I can not. This is no place for them."

"It's good enough for me."

"But not for the subject on which I have to speak," said Teddy, and the words were sharp. "Your wife."

"My wife!" Noble half rose—then sank back again. "A wife's place is with her husband—I do not object to talking of her here."

Teddy looked down at him, uncertain what method to pursue. The detective who had accompanied him still lingered at the door, and now an elderly man, the proprietor of the place, evidently, came over and said a few words in an undertone to Noble. To Teddy it seemed like an admonition. Noble rose, sulkily enough, shrugging his shoulders.

"Go ahead," he said, "I'm with you." He walked out with him along the street to the corner. Here Teddy paused and faced him.

"Will you tell me where I can have an interview with your wife?"

Noble threw back his head, laughing.

"That's a cool question. Will you tell me *why* you want to have an interview with my wife?"

"Yes. Her father is growing blind. He wants to see her once more before his sight fails him. I volunteered to come to find you. I have been to Binghamton and to Denver, and to New Haven. I have advertised for you in every American newspaper. Did you not see the advertisements?"

"Yes—I saw them. But I wasn't to be caught by any advertisement, you know. I might have known it was some one on a fool's errand." He laughed coarsely. "Not much to be afraid of in you, is there?"

"I hope not," said Teddy, controlling the desire that rose in him to grasp this fellow by the throat and shake him. "But that is neither here nor there. Will you take me to Lucile now? I am anxious to have this over."

"I'll think about it," said Noble, curtly, his manner changing. "Where are you stopping?"

"At the Fulton."

"How did you find me?"

"By the odor in which you are held at Police Headquarters,"

said Teddy. He could not resist the fling. It did not anger Noble. Instead it seemed to amuse him highly.

"You're not so stupid after all, then," he said, and the words were an insult.

Again Teddy's anger rose, and again he controlled it. Noble's manner became more crafty, more confident.

"I suppose you come with all sorts of inducements, all sorts of promises. I will never go back to that one-horse town."

"But your wife—surely you will allow her to visit her people, her mother—"

"I allow nothing. If she cares to go, she can. Wish she would. I'd be well rid of her."

The veins stood out on Teddy's forehead like cords.

"Are you talking of Lucile?" he asked.

"I am talking of Lucile."

There was silence. Teddy dared not trust himself to speak. There was no encouragement in the other's voice or manner. The young man was at a loss—what could he say next—how induce this creature to bring him to Lucile?

"I'm sure it would give your wife great pleasure to hear from her home," he said then. "Will you excuse me for forcing myself upon you? But I should dislike to return without having seen her, now that I am so near—"

"That will do," said Noble. "She can live without hearing from her home, or without seeing you, either."

"You refuse, then—"

"I refuse. That ought to be enough, oughtn't it? I refuse to allow you to see her, or to bring her news from her home."

"May I ask your reasons? Surely there would be no harm—"

"I do not choose to give my reasons. I might ask yours."

"Simply the desire of an old friend to convey to her the love of her family, and to tell her that her father—"

"She has not found her father necessary to her in two years. I don't see that he is necessary to her any more to-day than she was to him the day he turned her out."

"Surely you do not harbor resentment still?" asked Teddy, but his lips were pale with passion. "His was the natural anger of a man who—"

"I beg to be excused," said Noble.

"If you will not allow me to see her, will you at least tell her that her home people are anxiously awaiting news from her? Tell her to write to them. Or if you change your mind," he pulled out his wallet, "here is my card. The name of the hotel at which I am stopping is scribbled on the back—write me or telephone me there any time within the next two weeks."

Noble took the card carelessly and slipped it into his pocket. There was a half-mocking smile on his lips. Teddy stood looking at him, squaring his broad shoulders, and in the lamplight, streaming full into his face, Noble read the expression of disgust and contempt.

"As for you," said Teddy, then, slowly. "I don't know how far you have descended in the scale, or how utterly lacking in

decency you are. It may even be possible that you beat your wife —I would not be at all surprised. But you are a contemptible cur and I'd like to kick you from here to Denver, where you came from, and back again."

Noble's fist flew out instantly and his eyes flamed. But Teddy's iron fingers parried the blow, caught the other's two wrists, and held them in a grip like a vise.

"I can assure you that under the circumstances I will not thrash you," he said. "Perhaps you'd go home and make Lucile suffer for it. But if ever the day comes when I can do so, I promise you the finest dressing-down you ever received or ever will receive in your life. Faugh!" He gave him a push that sent him reeling. "Shoot me now, if you like—I've heard of your kind," he said, and turning on his heel, he walked away, unable to trust himself another moment in Noble's hateful presence.

Noble did not stir—then he slowly took the piece of pasteboard out of his pocket and tore it into fragments.

"If you expect to see my wife, young man," he said, with an evil smile on his lips, "you'll have some chance bring you together. Not I. So the old man is sorry—and he wants to have his daughter return, and talk sermons by the hour to her husband—" He laughed. "I'm past sermonizing. There was a time when I felt that I could take to it kindly—but that was only once in my life. It will never come again—never."

He went back to the gambling-house where Teddy Saunders

had found him. He was usually a heavy "plunger," but to-night he exceeded bounds, playing with a recklessness fairly astonishing to those who knew him well. He won, too. But this did not elate him in the slightest, even though his "luck," as he termed it, for the last two months had been more than poor.

At four o'clock that morning he walked swiftly along a quiet street on the West Side of the city, and when he reached the middle of the block, he let himself into the house with a latch-key. It was a second-rate boarding-house, and he and Lucile had rooms on the first floor.

Never once during all her two years of married life had Lucile Noble realized her desire for a home. Such places as these, some better, some worse, all indifferent, made the background of her days during this time. Constantly shifting, too, from one to the other. Never settled down, always ready to pack up what household goods she might possess, and follow the man she called her husband wherever he chose to go.

It had been martyrdom.

* * * * *

The dawn of the summer morning filled the room as he entered, and by its light he saw his wife, seated, dressed in a loose garment, in the chair at the window. The night had been oppressively warm, and she could not sleep. So she had sat up the better part of it, and at last tired nature conquered. She lay back, her hands folded in her lap, her face turned from the window toward the door, and as Paul Noble closed it behind him, he thought she was

looking at him, so dark were the shadows her lashes cast beneath her eyes.

Perhaps his encounter with Teddy Saunders had sharpened his wits where she was concerned. He stood looking at her, with frowning brows.

She had never recovered from the sorrow of her child's death, and he knew, too, in some subtle way, that all the love she had for him died the night on which their little boy had breathed his last. He knew that duty held her to him—a cord that has bound many families together long after love is extinguished. She never complained, never upbraided, never protested. Had she been less stoical in her endurance, she might have been able to do more with the man, but her silence angered him.

To-day her face was more peaceful than he had observed it in months. The lines of repression about the mouth were smoothed away, the brow was unwrinkled. Paul Noble knew that his wife was as far from him in thought and feeling as the stars were from the earth, and the impotence of his nature to rise to her height enraged him rather than made him sorry. Again and again he alluded to her "standing above him," but she never heeded. She had cast her lot with him, and until he refused to have anything to do with her she would abide with him. More than once in her desolate life the longing for home and for home love swept across her, but then she threw herself upon her knees and begged God to take the longing and the desire away.

For she had learned to pray. She had never done so until

her last hope was gone, and that was when the grave closed on the tiny white coffin that held the body of her child. Some of Peggy's simple faith came to her in the frightful melancholy that took possession of her then—Peggy's faith, intensified and beautified now that she was so far away from them. She knew what Leila suffered, then; she knew that Leila's faith had been her saving, and so, crudely, ignorantly enough, she reached up out of the darkness; reached up her trembling hands and begged a God who was preparing her, in this wise, for His heavenly kingdom, to have pity and to spare—to help her to do the duty which her folly had brought upon her.

God heard the prayer and heeded. And she took up her weary life and went on with it, and endured it, just as she asked God to permit her to do. Gradually she gave up thoughts of reclaiming her husband. His words, his actions, showed her that he had long been past reclamation. Her bitterest hours were those, when, instead of walking into their home, he fell into it, often lying where he had fallen, in drunken stupor. She could not touch him, then. She was not afraid of him at any time, but she had never even spoken to him when he was in his cups. Some pride restrained her; she was not disgusted, either—but she simply felt toward him as one human being of a proud and lofty spirit must feel toward another human being who wilfully degrades himself.

Paul Noble, on the other hand, really thought he treated his wife remarkably well. He gave her enough to eat and enough to

wear; she always had a roof above her head. That she asked nothing but bare necessities never struck him—his was not an observant nature. That she seldom smiled scarcely troubled him —he was enjoying his own mode of life too well to bother whether she was happy or not. But the meeting with Teddy Saunders had stirred him. Not to his betterment. He stood, with his hands in his pockets, frowning. And then a light seemed to break over him. He leaned forward and touched her.

"Wake up," he said.

CHAPTER XVII.

PAUL NOBLE'S WIFE.

LUCILE woke with a start. Her eyes, heavy with sleep, met her husband's glance with an altogether new expression—as if slumber had stolen away the mask worn by the woman he knew. She looked at him very quietly, and then about her.

"I must have fallen asleep," she said. "How light it is! You have just come in?"

"Yes," he answered, "I've just come in. I want you to be ready to leave here at ten o'clock. We must find some other boarding-house."

She bent her head, asking no questions. She had heard similar words too often to be astonished by them. He walked toward the bedroom.

"If you go to sleep," she said, "I shall not be able to wake you at ten o'clock—remember that. It is five now."

He did not answer this, nor did Lucile expect an answer. She dressed herself very slowly, gathered together what few personal belongings there were in the room and packed them. It was just half-past five then—too early for breakfast. She felt languid,

tired, oppressed by the heat. She put on her hat and went downstairs and out into the open air.

She loved the hours of the early summer dawn—they reminded her of the untainted sweetness of the Hubbold air—there was something fresh and pure in the dew that night had bestowed while the busy city slept, and which the rising sun would soon consume. Beyond the settled melancholy of her face she had changed little in two years. It seemed, sometimes, as if her life's great disappointment had taken the power of suffering away from her. The poignant anguish she felt when her child died had given way to a mute gratitude now that God had taken him. The thought that perhaps he would grow to manhood inheriting the vices of drink and gaming that were ruining Paul's life and had spoiled her own, was the chief reason of her gratitude.

But her husband had roused her from a dream of home. She had been standing on the steps of Hubbold Hall, watching Teddy Saunders drive away the day she had refused him. It had been a very vivid dream, and when Noble woke her she could scarcely collect herself for a few moments. She had been looking into Teddy's disappointed face, into his honest eyes, and the contrast struck her sharply. She felt that she must get out into the street and follow up the train of thought this dream had brought her.

She had been very happy then. She had not known her happiness—the happiness of an honest life, a respectable life. To a girl brought up in such home influences, the existence she led now seemed like a frightful nightmare; and if she permitted a

single rebellious feeling to conquer her she knew that she could not go on with it. So she set her teeth grimly and endured. She had bought this fate, bought it with open eyes, and with open eyes she would pay the price.

She was half-afraid now to risk letting her mind dwell on home and her home folk—but suddenly she understood that instead of exciting, it seemed to soothe her, and she allowed her imagination to take her where it would. It was sweet to think of them; to call upPeggy's laughing face, to look into her father's kind old eyes. Even her mother, so silent and so cold, seemed surrounded by a tenderness that she had never felt when near her.

"People change so," she thought. "People forget—even your nearest and dearest. I remember because I am not happy. *Would* I remember if Paul had been what I imagined he was, and had fulfilled my expectations? I remember because I have not done right. They have always done right—they have nothing to expiate: do they remember me?"

She stopped and turned her face to the blue sky above her.

"Do they think of me at home?" she asked, half aloud—and then recollected herself and glanced about her hurriedly. No one was near. Some distance ahead a man was walking—a well-built fellow, young, she could tell by the manner in which he carried himself. There was something in the straight back and the poise of the brown head that reminded her of Ted Saunders. Her heart began to beat rapidly. Poor old Ted! He and Peggy were probably married by this—he and Peggy were happy.

"I hope they are that always wherever they may be," she said. But her eyes sought that figure questioningly. How like he was to Teddy—his walk—the manner in which he swung his arms. And he turned and went into the church in the middle of the block. Lucile stood still. What a resemblance even at this distance! She walked forward slowly, passing the church door and glancing in. The priest was on the altar just beginning Mass. Lucile hesitated. She had not been inside any building of this sort since she left Hubbold—and this, the first impulse to enter one, came at the door of a church of Peggy's faith.

Would she enter? Was there anything like comfort to be found here? Would she feel more at peace, would she learn another reason for her suffering besides that which she already knew? Peggy had found consolation in religion—Leila—Charlie: would she, a being outside the fold, find it? Almost unconsciously she put her foot upon the step, but as she did so a violent trembling seized her. No. She would not ask anything more from God—except the endurance He had bestowed upon her. Not yet—not until she had paid the penalty in full. She drew back and turned away, and with bent head went on down the street.

Teddy Saunders, coming out when Mass was over, had a peculiar expression on his face. Strangely enough, he had felt the presence of the one he sought—and the fervor that feeling brought to his prayers seemed to convince him that he would indeed see her. So strong was this impression that he paused outside and looked

around him, his eyes eagerly searching the face of every woman as she left the church. He hated to confess, as he returned to his hotel, that he was disappointed. It did not seem altogether manly to be so influenced by what he called a natural nervousness. He had been so long living in hopes of seeing Lucile that it seemed as if his hopes in the end must bear fruit.

After her breakfast Lucile roused her husband. He got up, paid their bill to the landlady, and telling her to put on her hat again, left the house. She did not ask where they were going, but she looked a little puzzled when she saw the street into which he finally turned. Once one of the finest quarters of the city, it had fallen into a state of gradual decay, and now the wretched dwellings were sadly in need of repair. Lucile shrank close to her husband's side as he halted outside what appeared to her to be the worst and most wretched of the lot. But she asked no questions. He went up two flights of stairs, tapped on the door, which was opened to him by a woman who seemed to have grown old in uncleanliness, and then beckoned to his wife, who shrank, this time, away from him.

"Come in," he said, "come in. This is my wife, Mrs. Miggs. Have you the hall room empty? I want to take it, and the front room as well."

"The front room is full," said Mrs. Miggs. "But the hall room you can have, and, if you stay for a month, I'll let you have the other."

"Oh, we'll stay," he said, carelessly. "Show us the room."

Husband and wife, at her bidding, followed her. She unlocked the door at the other end of the hall, and then extended the key to Paul Noble.

"My terms is cash in advance for the week," she said.

"Here's your money." He put a bill in her hand as he spoke. She went away again, and he and Lucile were alone. The wife looked around the narrow room. There was nothing in it but a single bed, a washstand, and a chair, with a few hooks on the wall on which to hang their clothing. Not a muscle of her face moved. She took the pins from her hat and laid it on the bed—then went to the window and looked down into the street. The view was not encouraging, but still she showed no emotion. Lifting up the dressing-case, she proceeded to open it, and to take out the different articles of clothing it contained.

Paul Noble sat in the chair watching her. There was a strange gleam in his eyes, cruel lines about his mouth.

"We will eat in a restaurant," he said. "This woman does not furnish meals. For the present I am going to finish my sleep." He threw himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, and laughed. "I wonder what our father would say could he see us now."

She did not answer him. He lay expecting an answer, but she did not give it. He raised himself on one elbow.

"Any time you feel so disposed," he said. "Any time at all, you can go to him."

Then he went to sleep.

Lucile drew the one chair up to the window and sat with her back turned to the bed. She wondered, vaguely, how she could endure it—why she had no inclination to rebel. She was conscious of a sort of regret that she had not entered the church that morning; it might have made her better, it might have made her happier— She shrugged her shoulders. Whenever she was so disposed she could go to her father.

Go to her father!

No; she would not think of that. The end was not yet. She had not suffered enough. As soon as she felt that the atonement was sufficient she would go. But not until then.

Three hours later, when Paul Noble woke, he saw her sitting in that same position. He woke in a very bad humor, for it was insufferably warm, and the atmosphere of the tiny room stifling. He mopped his face and neck with the one towel, and put on a fresh collar.

"Get ready," he said, "we'll have something to eat. Get up, move around, do something. Don't sit there with the face of an image." He turned on her with sudden fury. "I suppose you think you're badly used—that you're a martyr and all that. Let me tell you I am sick and tired of your long face and your glum ways."

"I know it," said Lucile. "I'm sorry. There is a way of escape for you."

"Oh, yes, and for you."

She shook her head.

"You may leave me," she said, "whenever you please. I have told you that before. Until then it is my duty to stay."

"A good excuse," he said. "Perhaps if you met your friend Teddy—"

He paused. She looked at him with suddenly startled eyes and ashen face.

"What did you say?"

"I do not think your friend Teddy Saunders—do you remember him?—would have to ask you twice to return home with him. Are you sorry he is not here?"

"No," said Lucile, steadily.

"Oh, you would not go back with him?"

"Go back with him?" She stopped short. "Then Teddy *is* here! *Teddy is here!*"

Her voice shook.

"When did you see him?" she asked, after she had recovered herself.

It was not worth while to equivocate.

"Last night," he answered.

"Did he speak—of me?"

"Very little." He looked at her contemplatively. "He is here on his wedding-trip."

Whatever he meant to discover by that remark escaped him. Lucile scarcely heard; her lips were trembling.

"My father—did he mention my father?"

"He's well—that's all."

She winced. Her heart began to ache a little under the calm which had become habitual.

"So he did not want to see me?" she asked, doubtfully. "But you knew he came from home—you knew I would want to see him. Why did you not ask him to wait? Why did you not bring him with you? Oh, you knew I would want to talk— Where did you meet him?"

"In Dolling's place."

"Dolling's!" Her eyes widened. "Why, that is the gambling-house, isn't it, that you told me of?"

"Yes. That's all right. I guess Teddy Saunders isn't a saint, either, although you seem to think him one."

"No," said Lucile. "He is no saint, but at least he's honorable. Was your meeting an accident?"

"Purely accidental."

"And Teddy gambled?"

"He lost all he gambled on."

Lucile's lips set tightly together.

"I do not believe you," she said. "Teddy Saunders would not do a thing like that on his wedding-trip, and after doing it he would not go to Mass as he did this morning. Oh, to think— it must have been Teddy after all!"

It was Noble's turn to be surprised.

"Mass this morning? You mean, then, that you have seen him?"

She did not answer.

"You have seen him!" he said, between his shut teeth. "Well, you're mine, do you hear? I own you—you belong to me, let who will come after you. You think that your father has sent him, that he is looking for you—"

"No," said Lucile, quietly. "I did not. But I am glad. I thought they had forgotten. I am very glad. And," she went on, "I do realize that I belong to you, let who will come after me."

The words, the note in them silenced him. He said no more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ADVERTISEMENT.

If Lucile's life had been martyrdom before, it became, for the next few days, veritable agony in the mental torment she endured. She had endured in silence the neglect of the man whose name she bore; she had never questioned his actions, but now the thought that those who loved her had been so near—perhaps seeking her; the thought that she had seen Teddy—there was no doubt in her mind that the man who entered the little church was he—and that she had let him go away from her without a sign, caused her the greatest suffering.

And why the changed demeanor of her husband? He had never been attentive; she had become used to his carelessness. But now he watched her every action, so that the constant espionage began to wear upon her. The neighborhood into which he had brought her was an unsavory one and she was not permitted to leave it. She tried to. She tried to steal out to the little church during the early morning hours, hoping that she might see Teddy once more—but her husband found a way to frustrate this intention. If he was at home, he followed her; if

not at home when she left, she was sure to meet him ere she reached the corner.

"If he is so anxious to discover us, he may happen along here at any time," Noble said to her. "But you shall not speak to him. You are my wife, and I will not have you hold communication with him."

"Why?" asked Lucile. "Would there be any harm in hearing news from home? What could Teddy have to tell me that you would not want me to hear?"

"Paul," she said, pleadingly, as the week wore on, "I have asked you nothing for myself this last two years. Take me to where Ted is and let me talk to him—let me hear from his own lips how all my dear ones are. Let me see Peggy—he is surely married to Peggy. I love Peggy and in her heart she loves me, too. Take me, Paul—come with me. I don't want you to feel as if you are not one of us. I shall employ every subterfuge possible to conceal—to conceal what you do, if—if you will take me."

Noble laughed. And she knew, then, that he would not grant her prayer, and her heart sank within her.

"How do you think Teddy found me?" he said. And then, when he saw her change of expression, he knew he had betrayed himself.

"Found you?" said Lucile, with whitening face. "*Found you!* I thought you said—you said you met him accidentally—in a gambling-house. Paul! Teddy is here looking for us—for me!" She threw herself on her knees before him. "Paul, if

there is one feeling of manhood, of honor, left in your heart, take me to him. My father must be ill—perhaps dying. Paul, see, I beg of you."

"Manhood! Honor!" he repeated, scornfully. "What little manhood or honor was left me you have effectually quenched."

She shrank back, looking up at him with startled face.

"I?" she faltered.

"You. You could have done what you pleased with me—but you made me feel always as if you were mountain-high above me. You made me feel your superiority. Your pride and your scorn sickened me. Had you been gentle as another woman would be—"

"And you reproach me!" she said. She rose to her feet, then, and her face hardened. "You reproach *me!*"

"No," said Noble, "I do not. I am simply telling you that had you been different you could have made a different man of me. That you have yourself to thank if you are not satisfied."

She laughed. It was the echo of his own laugh a moment since. The old passionate temper flared within her.

"Had I been a different woman you would have treated me as such men as you treat different women," she said. She went close to him. "I have never been afraid of you, although I know you for a drunkard and a bully. I did everything I could to help you lead a better life until the night my baby died. After that you were no longer the father of my child—you were a crea-

ture whom I was bound to—whom I had taken to myself, and whom I must put up with. When you wish to get rid of me, I am ready to go. So you reproach *me* with your mode of living! You reproach *me*. You do well."

She turned from him and went to the window. With a cruel smile on his lips he looked at her.

"I do not wish to get rid of you," he said. "If you are waiting for *me* to release you, possess your soul in patience. You will live, I hope, a good many years to enjoy the pleasure of my society."

"I have one consolation," said Lucile, meeting cruelty with coldness. "You informed me once that there were no long-lived people in your family. At least there is that much to be grateful for."

The shot struck home; his face changed quickly, for like all of his ilk—who have no hope beyond the pleasures of this poor world—he was afraid of death. A sudden hot flame leaped into his eyes, and he started forward with clenched fists. Lucile turned her head, and her contemptuous gaze met his. She was utterly fearless and he knew that if he beat her to the ground those eyes would still stare up at him with that great scorn in their depths. His hands fell.

"I shall live longer than you think," he snarled. "Three times the years you've set for me—I may outlive yourself."

She smiled.

"I pray to God you may," she said. "That is one thing can

not come any too quickly for me—it would be the most welcome guest. I wish to see Teddy Saunders, to hear from home—but if I thought I could meet death first—" she shrugged her shoulders. " You do not understand. It is just as well."

She turned back again to the window, staring out into the gathering darkness. He seized his hat and without any further word banged the door behind him and went down the stairs.

Left alone, Lucile did not stir for a long time—until her limbs became tired. Then she seated herself wearily on the side of the bed. She was asking herself how long she could endure this misery. Her heart was aching—not dully now, but with a new, keen pain. She felt as if the death she longed for must release her if that pain continued.

A shuffling step came along the hall, and in a few minutes some one knocked at the door. Lucile glanced toward it wearily.

" Come in," she said. " Oh, it is you, Mrs. Miggs? "

" I thought you'd be all alone," she said, in her husky voice, " when I saw Noble going out like that. It's a shame for him to be leaving a pretty young creature like you without any one to talk to. It won't be so bad when the next room is empty—it will be more home-like there. There's pictures on the wall and curtains and a fine ingrain carpet—"

Lucile shuddered.

" It will be nice," she said, " much nicer, I'm sure."

" You're very pale—you're not feeling well? "

" A woman's complaint, Mrs. Miggs—headache."

"That's too bad—it's from worrying. Don't worry over Paul Noble—it won't do you a bit of good."

"I gave up worrying long ago, Mrs. Miggs."

"That's right."

Lucile saw that she was prepared to stay, and a desperate feeling surged through her as the woman placed her capacious figure on the one chair the room contained. "You didn't run away with Noble, now, did you?"

"I have been married to him over two years," said Lucile, evasively.

"Well, now! He didn't say how long, and I thought it was a runaway match on account of the advertisements—"

"The advertisements?"

"I'll bet he never told you a word about them! Haven't you been seeing the advertisements in all the newspapers?"

"No," said Lucile, mechanically. Her fingers locked one over the other, as she stared into the woman's face.

"I'll go fetch you a paper this minute, then," said Mrs. Miggs. "If I can find it." She hesitated. "Would you like a cup of tea—a good, hot, strong cup of tea?"

"If you had it—" began Lucile, eagerly. "I would be glad to pay you—"

"Tut!" said Mrs. Miggs. "I'm not that bad—no, indeed. You can have the tea and welcome. The kettle is boiling and I'll get it in a jiffy. Meanwhile I'll look for the paper—"

Lucile lay very quietly on the bed until the woman returned

with the tea in one hand and a crumpled newspaper in the other. Wisely, Mrs. Miggs would not surrender the latter until the young woman had taken the stimulant. In spite of the heat it made her feel better. She sat up, then, and went through the long list of personals. She read the one asking for the whereabouts of Paul Noble and his wife with quickening pulses—address or call on T. S., Hotel Fulton. Teddy at last! She started to her feet with gleaming eyes.

"Mrs. Miggs, I am going to find out what this means," she said. "Thank you a thousand times for showing it to me. It is some one from home—some one I am anxious to see. I won't be gone very long. If—my husband returns—"

"I'll say nothing," said Mrs. Miggs. "He warned me not to let you look at a newspaper, nor to show you one—"

"Perhaps he was afraid it would upset me," said Lucile, still with an instinctive wish to shield her trouble from outside knowledge. "But I must go—I must see this—this person. I shall not stay—and if Paul comes back," she drew her breath sharply through her set teeth, "let him come. I will not care—if only I can succeed."

A gleam of sympathy showed in the woman's eyes a moment.

"Whoever it may be, I hope they don't let you back again," she said, as she followed Lucile out in the hall. "You're too good for Noble—you're not the sort of a wife he should have. He wants some one like himself. I know what I'm talking about. I came down in the world when I married Miggs and thought I

could reform him. It's a true saying that a woman can live up to a man if he's better brought up than she, but a man can never live up to the woman."

With these words ringing in her ears Lucile went out into the night. A feverish fear possessed her that Paul might be near at hand to intercept her as usual. She was afraid that now she could not accomplish the desire of her heart. Ted Saunders! And Peggy! Just to clasp Peggy in her arms and kiss her—oh, it would be so sweet! And to hear from home—from her father! She had not realized how cruel her husband was until the joy of at last being able to see these two filled her whole being. Every step that drew her nearer to her destination seemed to be severing her more and more from Paul. She was weak and sick when finally she halted outside the well-lighted portals of the great building. She looked up at it, her heart beating to suffocation. Somewhere within it were Teddy and her cousin, her dear little cousin.

Her face was quite pale as she entered the hall. She had to wait to recover the breath that seemed failing her. Her lips were cold. But she approached the clerk at last.

"There has been a gentleman advertising from this hotel recently," she began, a little astonished at the calmness of her tones, "asking the whereabouts of Paul Noble and his wife. The gentleman's name is Saunders, isn't it?"

"Yes, madam," said the clerk, looking at her curiously. "He—"

"Will you tell him, please, that Mrs. Noble is here and would like to see him—"

"Mr. Saunders left for his home this morning."

Lucile stared at him.

"Mr. Saunders—"

"Went away—went back to Hubbold this morning. There is a letter for Mrs.—"

But he did not finish. The man's face faded from Lucile's sight—the room swirled about her. With a little gasp she sank to the floor, mercifully deprived of consciousness.

CHAPTER XIX.

RELEASE.

WHEN her senses returned she was lying on a couch in one of the private parlors of the hotel. A woman employee had been called to attend her. Lucile struggled to a sitting posture with words of apology on her lips.

"I am so sorry," she said. "I very seldom give way like this. Thank you so much for taking care of me." She took up her purse. It contained a fifty-cent piece—the last penny she had in the world, but Lucile, despite the fact that money had, by its absence, played a conspicuous part in her life this last two years, would never learn forethought. She pressed it into the woman's hand.

"There is a letter for you—Mr. Roberts told me to tell you that you shouldn't go until he had given it to you—"

"May I read it here? Ask him to bring it here," said Lucile.

The woman obeyed with alacrity and the clerk himself brought it—with the desire, perhaps, to see more of the pale and pretty young woman who had so excited his curiosity.

"When did Mr. Saunders leave?" asked Lucile.

"This morning. He had been waiting over ten days for some

news. He thought, then, that the persons he desired to see would not come. He left a letter in case Mrs. Noble came; I was to return it after three months. May I ask you," he hesitated. "Mr. Saunders instructed me to ask you your father's name—just as a precaution—"

"David Tarrant," said Lucile, holding out her hand for the letter: which the young man gave to her without any further ado, and then went away. Lucile broke the seal. Some bank notes fell into her lap and she picked them up in wonder. But her eyes were fastened eagerly on the written words.

"DEAR LUCILE:

"I have been looking for you since June. I went to Binghamton—from Binghamton to Denver; back from Denver to New Haven; from New Haven to New York City. I have been here since the middle of August and shall leave to-day, the twelfth of September. I met Paul Noble. He would not allow me to see you. I do not think you will ever know I came to look for you, unless you find it out by chance.

"Dear Lucile, I am inclosing one hundred dollars, so that if you see this letter, and you need money, it will at least pay your expenses out to Hubbold, in case you are able to come. Leila and Charlie are well and have a little daughter, Margaret. Peggy is well and has promised to marry me. Your father is longing to see you, as are we all in fact.

"I feel that it is useless to write any more. You will under-

stand everything I want to write. Lucile, those at home are praying that you will come back soon. Come back, Lucile, if only for a single day.

"Your friend,

TEDDY."

Blunt and honest and brief as the young man himself were the words he wrote, but Lucile read between the lines; she knew all that he would have said had he been able to, or had he not feared that other eyes might rest on this letter. Very carefully she folded the bills and placed them in the bosom of her dress. Then she tore the letter into tiny bits, holding them in her hand, feeling, as she walked out, that she could not bear to part with them.

Yes; she would save the money to go back to Hubbold, when the time came. But would it come, ever? Her brows contracted with pain. Would it come, would she ever feel herself free, would she ever be able to turn her face toward that haven of peace and comfort?

She was nearing the little church which Teddy had entered that morning and the thought that he had been in it seemed to draw her inside. Nor did she dream of resisting the impulse. She knelt in one of the rear pews, her eyes fastened on the altar, her hands clasped in prayer.

"I think if I had seen him then, or talked to him, I would not have been able to resist going with him," she thought. "God kept me back—God doesn't mean me to leave yet. . . . Dear

father, dear father! May the same God who is looking down on me protect and care for you and not let you grieve for a daughter who is not worthy of your tenderness."

She was conscious of a great weariness—a bodily weakness, a feeling of lassitude that had never before assailed her. A half-smile parted her lips.

"It would break his heart if I were to die without him seeing me again," went on her thoughts. "I mustn't die yet. . . . Would Paul be sorry? . . . what was it he said—that had I been different—"

A shudder went over her.

"A man never can live up to a woman! Is that true? That woman said so—that woman! And I must go back to that hovel. Oh, Paul, Paul, Paul, I have not deserved any of this from you—none of it. Pride and coldness are my only safeguards. Where would gentleness have led me? Still further down—you would have had no respect for a meek woman. You have little enough for me as it is—but for a woman upon whom you could trample—"

She sat up straight, a shudder going over her.

"I can't be different," she said, half aloud. Her eyes were fastened on the altar. "I can't be different. He is my husband, yes—but I—"

She could not finish the sentence. After a little she took up the thread of her thoughts again.

"I will not say I hate him—not here. I have no right to say that I hate him. I would not want my father to say he hated me."

Again she paused. She was fighting a battle with herself. She did not know it, but this time it was no longer the battle of stoicism, the battle of endurance. Rather a battle with gentler impulses to which she had long been a stranger; an inclination toward mercy and pity.

"I can't be different," she said again, between her shut teeth. She knew then that she would yield. It did not last much longer. Gradually a softer expression stole into her face and the hard light died out of her eyes.

"I *will* be different," she whispered, "I will. From this moment on I will be different. If kind words can help to reclaim him, he shall have them. God help me to be gentle where I have been cold; tender where I have been proud. God help me."

She rose to her feet then and went out into the night. She felt happier. She had not known what fearful restraint she had placed upon herself until now, when the restraint was lessened, when she had made up her mind to try to touch his heart once more. She felt no reluctance as she sped onward, she was not afraid as she turned down the street where slatternly women gazed at her curiously from open doors, and untidy children barred her path at every step. She reached the place that was her home. She would ask Paul to take her away to-morrow. He was trying her; well, she would lean down to him: give him more of her confidence. . . .

She ran lightly up the stairs; entered the room. Her husband was seated at the window. She had never seen the expres-

sion on his face that it wore now. A feeling of expectation went over her: she was prepared for anything.

"I have been waiting for you," he said.

At his tone Lucile felt the old stiffness creeping into her manner, but she resolutely put it away.

"I did not expect you back so soon," she said. "You do not usually return as early as this."

He mistook the tremor in her voice for fear. Something like a brutal satisfaction filled him.

"I followed you," he said, "to the hotel. I watched you come out after your interview with Saunders. You compared notes, I suppose. You found out that I lied to you when I told you he was here on his wedding-trip. You know now that he wants you to go home with him. Well, it doesn't matter—I see I'm as big a fool as you are to try to keep you. I saw you go into the church —and then came back to this delightful home of ours to have a last word with you."

"A last word?" echoed Lucile.

"Yes," said Paul Noble. "I'm tired of you. I want you to go away—I want you to get out; I don't want ever to see you again. You sicken me with your sanctimonious face, and now that religion seems to have taken possession of you, I want no more of you. You hear me? I—want—no—more—of—you."

"I hear," said Lucile. Her lips were white. "Paul," she said, coming nearer to him, "Paul, listen to me. You said to-day that had I been different you would have been a better man.

Paul, is it too late, now? If I try to be kind and more loving as —in the old days, would it make you different? For I have made up my mind to try. Let us both start together this night, you and I. Take me away from here—you know you only took me here to try me—out of a little spite, perhaps. Let us go to more respectable quarters. I don't want you to break off everything at once —give me one night a week of your society in the beginning, and it will satisfy me. See, Paul—it is the old Lucile now—I'll try to care for you again in the old way, and perhaps, after a time, it all may come back—"

Her voice broke. The man stood with lowering brow and eyes bent on the ground. His good angel fought a hard battle for him that night. But in Lucile's new phase of feeling he saw danger to his cherished line of conduct. The full heinousness of it came upon him as he saw the two paths: the one of righteousness and that of wrong-doing. Deliberately he chose the latter.

"You can do as you please," he said. "Go where you please. I have long been thinking of telling you this—and now that the chance offers itself I mean to take it. Dolling has asked me to join him in a place he's going to open in 'Frisco—it's getting too hot here to hold him. I'm going."

"And I?"

"You are not. Your wifely responsibility ends to-night—unless I go broke. If so," he laughed, "I'll call on father—"

"Don't," said Lucile. Her breath was coming fast. "Don't, Paul. If it's really over now, don't make my thoughts any

bitterer. You'll do just what you say: you are not injuring me —but when you stand before God, do not lay the blame of your wasted life upon your wife's shoulders. That is all. I forgive you every pang you have cost me, every bit of sorrow, remember that. But when we part, we part. I hope that I never see your face again—and if I should—well, it will be as if it were the face of a stranger— But, no! Paul, just once more. I did love you—I did, in the old days. Don't you believe you have a soul, and that God will hold you responsible—"

"Tut!" he said; "Spare me that." He paused on the threshold. "If you care to, you can go back to your Teddy Saunders, and tell him the man he'd like to kick from here to Denver—"

"Paul, I beg of you—I will not listen. Just a moment—just wait—"

He opened the door and shut it behind him. His footsteps echoed along the hall. Lucile stood listening, her hands clasped across her bosom. Her eyes were wide with fear—with doubt. It was true, then. He had indeed cast her off. There was nothing left for her to do but to accept the inevitable. Her duty was ended—he would have no more of her.

The suddenness of this sense of release was too much for her tried spirit. She sank on her knees, and the tears that had not touched her eyes in many days forced their way to the surface now, trickling in slow, heavy drops through her fingers.

Nothing, nothing stood in her way. She could return. And she would return. Back to Hubbold, back to her father, back to

love and tenderness and peace—once more to know the shelter of her own home; once more to feel the pressure of loving arms and loving lips— Back to her mother, to Peggy, to Leila— Oh, how she would love them to make up for the years that she had been indifferent. How she would love them all!

For the first time in many months Lucile Noble went to bed that night to sleep.

CHAPTER XX.

THE END.

SHE waited all the next day, determined to give her husband every chance to change his mind. She left the house at nightfall—Mrs. Miggs had been good enough to get her some food—and went back to the church where she had found such consolation the previous evening.

She had fully resolved to go home.

Surely she had endured enough. Surely she had paid for her mistake. She had suffered the penalty for two years: and, now, deserted by her husband, cast off, there was nothing to bar her return to her father's house. She tried to look at it calmly, but the joy that filled her every vein would not be quenched. She felt that it would be wrong to entertain this joy, and yet she was almost happy.

"Peggy must trust God as I trust my father," she said. "She must have that much belief in Him. Dear Peggy, how glorious it will be to see her face again! I hope she has not changed—I want to hear her laugh. I want her to make those funny, quaintly-wise remarks—I want to feel my father's arms about me

—I will love him—yes, I will pay him in full for all that he has suffered."

Still with that joy in her heart she went back again.

"To-morrow morning," she said, to Mrs. Miggs, "I am going home."

"And what about Noble?"

"He is not coming back here," said Lucile.

"You mean that he's left you?"

For a moment Lucile struggled with the wish to conceal this painful truth.

"Yes," she said, finally. "He has gone to San Francisco."

Mrs. Miggs planted her stout hands on her capacious hips.

"Could you look me in the eye and say you're sorry, ma'am?"

Lucile gazed at her, startled.

"You wouldn't be human to be sorry," she said, "so don't pretend it to me. I don't know anything about you nor where you come from nor what you're going back to, but it's the wisest move you ever made. You could spend your life for some men and they wouldn't thank you at the end of it. Noble's one of that kind."

"They are not all so," said Lucile, softly. "I have a father and a cousin—the two best men I ever knew—oh, there are many good men in the world, Mrs. Miggs."

"It would be a poor world, if there weren't," said Mrs. Miggs. "But seems to me it's the contrast makes them good."

Lucile shook her head.

"I'm afraid you're a man-hater," she said. "Paul Noble might be more thoughtful than he is, but because we were not happy does not argue that all other men are like him."

"After a time you'll find some one else—"

Lucile smiled.

"No," she said, "there never will be any one else."

"I'd get a divorce from him on the principle of the thing. You can."

"I can not."

"It isn't that you're a Catholic?"

Lucile paused in the folding of the few garments she meant to take away with her. There was a peculiar light in her eyes.

"I'm not a Catholic yet," she said, "but I mean to be one just as soon as I go home, if I'm good enough."

She had not thought of this before, but now she knew that she had resolved on it—that it had been in her mind a long while. And the declaration made her joyous. She looked at the woman with a face into which new happiness had grown.

"Yes; I will be a Catholic," she said.

* * * * *

It chanced that after leaving the Hotel Fulton Teddy stopped over in Philadelphia a day and a half to attend to some business connected with the Mills, about which Charlie had written him. This satisfactorily concluded, he went home. The morning that saw him alight at the familiar Hubbold station was to him a

morning of miserable anticipation. He felt that another man would not have returned defeated; he felt that he had acted tardily in not following Noble or having him followed, and so discover Lucile. But the desire to keep family affairs to himself had overcome all others. It hardly seemed possible that Lucile could have failed to see one of the many advertisements which he had caused to be inserted in the newspapers, and there was little doubt that Noble would tell her something of Teddy's visit to the city. He knew Lucile of old—knew her independent spirit well, and it did not seem possible that a man like Paul Noble could have everything his own way with a woman like Lucile for a wife. Teddy Saunders, with his home-loving disposition, his honest, blunt manner, and his somewhat countrified tastes, had no idea of the nature of such men as Paul Noble. In fact, all Teddy's ideas of the world outside Hubbold he had derived from books. He was simple, manly, a gentleman—and to him there were some things which no man could do—not even such a man as Paul Noble was reputed to be.

So his failure to see Lucile he attributed partly to her own wish in the matter. But what would Peggy say? How would she take the news of his failure? How could he go to her and tell her that he had met Lucile's husband and, because that husband would not permit it, he had let Lucile slip out of his grasp?

He knew that if he went through the town now the news that he had returned would reach Hubbold Hall before he did. He turned off the road leading into the main street, and took the path

that led to the Dulcimer cottage. It had been kept, since his grandmother's death, by an old couple who were devoted to Teddy, and whom he knew he could trust in this emergency.

After the first greetings were over, Teddy turned to the old man.

"I don't want you to tell any one that I have come back," he said. "I must see Charlie Stanton—you must go to the Mills with this note for me. Hitch up the horse and bring him back with you, if he is not too busy."

"He won't be too busy, that's sure," thought Teddy, somewhat impatiently, as he stood at the window of the small parlor. "And I know he'll be delighted at my success."

He twisted his upper lip between his finger and thumb in a perturbed fashion.

"There was nothing else I could do," he said aloud, "nothing else."

When Charlie came into the room Teddy was in the same position at the window. Charlie had both hands extended, a cordial smile on his face.

"Welcome home," he said, "welcome home, Ted. What news?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" A shadow fell across the young man's forehead. "Nothing at all?"

"I found them—in New York City. But I did not see Lucile."

"Her husband? How about her husband? Did you find out anything about his life, his—

"Yes; I met him. He would not permit me to see her." Teddy turned around quickly. "If you can think of any scheme, Charlie, I'm ready to start back again. It's a delicate affair, and only one of her family can attend to it. Pretty tough on me to have to come back such a rank failure—"

"Tell me all about it, Ted," said Charlie.

He listened gravely while Ted began at the beginning and briefly related just what had occurred. Most of the details he had kept from Peggy—the circumstances connected with the death of Lucile's child, and Paul Noble's true reputation. He told all to Charlie now, and Charlie listened with grave brow and set lips.

"The worst of it is this," he said, "we have said nothing to Uncle Tarrant, but he seems to connect your absence with Lucile. I don't know how he got the idea, but he has it. He is almost positive that when you return, Lucile will return with you. Ted, I'm afraid the disappointment will be more than he can bear."

"If you can suggest anything," said Teddy, eagerly. "Or if you will give me permission— It seems hateful to do, I know, but I would have Noble shadowed, and then go to the house and interview Lucile in his absence. I didn't want to do that, Charlie—"

"Well, I'll do it," said Charlie. "I'll go back with you, Ted, and we'll do it together. I'll send Larry up with a note to Leila

and another one to Wilkes at the Mills, and then we'll go on the next train."

"Don't say I'm here at all," said Teddy. "It's better to tell them nothing."

"They will surmise I have heard from you," said Charlie. "It's hard to leave the Mills just now, but Wilkes is trustworthy —and I don't want Uncle Tarrant to face this disappointment. Sit down there while I write my letters."

But Teddy could not sit down. With restless feet he walked up and down the room, pausing occasionally at the window. It was during the last of these pauses that he stood stock still, gazing out along the sunlit road. He kept very quiet, his lips parted expectantly, his eyes straining. Then, without turning, he called:

"Charlie! Come here one moment."

Charlie looked up from the note he was finishing.

"Right away, Ted."

"Come now," he said, in tones of repressed excitement. "Come now."

Moved to curiosity, Charlie went to the window and stood beside him.

"Am I going crazy?" asked Teddy, in a low voice. "Am I mad? You look, and tell me who that is walking toward the house."

Charlie looked. His answer was a muttered exclamation as he turned and ran from the room. Ted did not need an invitation to follow. In an instant two hatless men had raced down the

path, cleared the gate, and were running along the road to meet the woman slowly advancing in their direction.

It was Lucile.

Almost before she knew it Charlie had his arms about her, and Ted had clasped her two hands in his and was shaking them violently. No one spoke clearly for the next few seconds. There was a jumble of words without any sense to them, but through all the jumble rang the great gladness and joy of these honest friends.

"We were going back to New York on the next train," said Charlie. "And now we won't even ask you how you got here. The horse is still hitched up, isn't he, Ted? We'll all pile in and get old Larry to drive us to the Hall at once."

"My father?" questioned Lucile. "Tell me one thing—my father is well?"

"His health is splendid," said Charlie. "His eyes trouble him considerably, though, Lucile."

"His eyes?" She looked at him, startled.

"Yes. Try to brace up, old girl—you might as well hear the worst news first. His sight has almost failed him. That's why Teddy went after you—to bring you back before the light went out altogether. Don't feel badly," he said, reaching over and patting her hand; "it's the worst you'll have to bear, cousin, and he can still see you."

They drove to the Hall by an unfrequented path and even reached it without being observed. Peggy had had no inkling

of their coming, and the scene that ensued between the two cousins was a touching one. But Lucile's great impatience struggled through it all.

"My father, Peggy," she said, voicing her overpowering desire, "take me to my father."

Mr. Tarrant was seated on the southern porch, with Leila in a low rocker beside him, and the baby Margaret on his knee. He was talking in a slow, hesitating fashion that struck Lucile painfully. She remembered his clear voice, his decisive tones. She was standing quite close inside, so that she might see him well—Peggy whispered that there was no danger of his discovering her.

"Come, Leila," called Peggy, from the doorway, at last. "Isn't it time to give Meg something to eat?"

Leila looked up in surprise—but one glance at Peggy's tear-stained face and then at the figure behind her made her tremble. She took the baby in her arms.

"We'll come back in a few minutes to grandfather," she said, softly. "Kiss him, baby, before you go."

The little one obeyed, and Leila stole away. The old man turned his head toward the garden where the late roses still lingered. There was a wistful expression on his face. His ears, grown keener because of failing sight, heard the rustle of a woman's garments.

"Is it you, Peggy?" he asked. "I am glad to have you alone a little while—I have not been able to ask you any questions in over a week. Peggy, when did you hear from Ted?"

There was no answer. He sat back in his chair, and turned his face toward the little rocker.

"You have heard from him, Peggy?" he repeated. "Is he coming—"

A sob interrupted him. The woman in the rocker threw herself on her knees before him.

"My father, oh, my father!"

The old man could not speak or stir. His arm went about her convulsively and held her. His eyes peered into her upturned, tear-wet face.

"Lucile! It is Lucile! It is my daughter! O God, I thank Thee!"

* * * * *

Some months later Peggy Stanton gave the parishioners of St. Francis de Sales' the sensation Leila had anticipated. The day of her marriage was a thrice-blessed one to her, for on that day Lucile and her father were received into the Church. Afterward they said that they had begun to live on Peggy's wedding-day.

They are very happy. To a great extent Lucile has taken Peggy's place as the good angel of the parish. She is that to every tried, unhappy soul, and no one is afraid to come to her with whatever tale of misery or wrong-doing he or she may have to tell.

Of Paul Noble nothing more was heard. His fate was probably that of others of his kind, his end the end of one who has set the laws of God and man at defiance, unless divine grace inter-

vened. Perhaps it did, for Lucile prayed daily for his conversion. She was an entirely different character to the Lucile Tarrant the residents of Hubbold had known. To her father she was light and joy the remainder of his days. He was truly happy. Mrs. Tarrant, also, found in this new Lucile a loving and tender daughter, whose trials had brought her further on the road to perfection.

So we leave them all—dear little Peggy and honest Ted; Charlie and Leila, loving and beloved; Lucile, her father and her mother—all save the latter united in the one great desire that Mrs. Tarrant, too, may know the peace of their faith before she dies.

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